



Little cause to celebrate

GIZA'S Urgent Affairs Court yesterday suspended the implementation of an earlier ruling to separate university professor Nour Hamed Abu Zeid from his wife because his writings on Islam made him an apostate, reports Khaled Dawoud. Abu Zeid and his wife Ibtihal Yonis are now living in self-imposed exile in the Netherlands, in the belief that the ruling is tantamount to a mandate for their killing at the hands of Islamist militants.

The latest ruling has served only to complicate what from the start has been an extraordinary case, which has deeply shocked Egyptian intellectuals. While a lower court had dismissed the case against Abu Zeid, the Cairo Appeals Court, and finally the Court of Cassation — the highest court in the land — had reversed the ruling, declared Abu Zeid an apostate, and ordered his separation from his wife.

Abu Zeid's supporters are not celebrating the latest ruling, however. According to Mustafa Hassan, one of Abu Zeid's lawyers, yesterday's ruling is unrelated to the Court of Cassation ruling. "The lawsuit we won today is only to stop the implementation of the Cairo Appeals Court's separation order," he said. The ruling did not nullify the Court of Cassation ruling, but made it impossible for anyone to seek its implementation, he added.

And for Samir El-Bagouri, another Abu Zeid lawyer, "it will always remain a reality that one of Egypt's highest courts [the Court of Cassation] issued a ruling separating a man from his wife because of his beliefs. All that follows are just attempts to stop the bleeding, but the wound is very deep."

IMF delay

INTERNATIONAL Monetary Fund Managing Director Michel Camdessus postponed a visit to Cairo this week but IMF sources denied that the delay was caused by any disagreement between the two sides. Rather, the sources told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Camdessus was needed at home to preside over heated debates about fund management of Third World debts.

Camdessus was scheduled to meet President Hosni Mubarak and senior Egyptian officials to discuss Egypt's plans for economic reform. A comprehensive programme will be given to the IMF's executive board on 11 October. An agreement between the two sides is necessary for Egypt to obtain \$5.5 billion in debt reduction from the Paris Club of Western creditors.

Spoils of war

THE CULTURE minister and head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), Farouk Hosni, said yesterday that during the Badr '96 war games, which ended a week ago, three antique Siveptite statues and some canopic jars were found in southern Egypt, reports Ashraf Abdel-Moneim. Hosni's declaration came after he received a phone call from Minister of Defence Hussein Tantawi informing him of the discovery.

Siveptite statues are small mummified figures buried with the dead body and said to be magically brought to life to serve the body in the after-life, according to Pharaonic beliefs.

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Intifada

In New York, reports Hoda Tawfik, Amr Moussa issued yet another warning, and in Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Territories, Palestinians took to the streets

Palestinian police and Israeli soldiers engaged in gun battles near the self-rule town of Ramallah yesterday as riots erupted in Jerusalem and the West Bank — the worst violence since the 1987-93 Intifada against Israeli occupation. The violence was touched off by Israel's completion of a tunnel which passes underneath Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, Islam's third holiest shrine.

Yesterday's gun battle erupted near an Israeli army checkpoint south of Ramallah, where Israeli troops had tried for hours to break up a protest by more than 1,000 Palestinian stone-throwers.

According to The Associated Press, several bursts of automatic fire were aimed at the Israeli troops, who took cover and then returned fire. Israel Radio said the Palestinians who opened fire wore police uniforms.

Maj. Gen. Uzi Dayan, Israeli commander of the West Bank, said the troops were being fired upon from a building controlled by Yasser Arafat's Palestinian National Authority.

Israel Radio later said Israeli troops had entered Palestinian-held Ramallah in pursuit of gunmen who had fired at them from inside the West Bank city. The radio said it was the first time Israeli soldiers had entered a self-rule enclave since Israel began handing over parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to Palestinian self-rule in 1994.

At least 148 Palestinian protesters were hurt in Ramallah during the course of the day, as Israeli troops fired live ammunition, rubber bullets and tear gas to break up stone-throwing riots, AP said. The French news agency AFP said two Palestinians were killed.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who had personally given orders to workmen to complete the last stretch of the tunnel under cover of darkness on Tuesday, said the narrow passage revealed an important chapter in Jewish history. "We are touching the backbone of our existence," Netanyahu said.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat denounced the tunnel as a "big crime" that violated Muslim religious rights and called for a "commercial strike and protest marches yesterday."

The Palestinians also postponed a round of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks that had been scheduled for today, according to Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat. Israel said the talks would be held on Sunday.

Arafat blamed Israel for the violence. "This is an escalation by the Israeli government against our people who are protesting against a breaching of the [peace] agreement," he told reporters outside his Gaza City headquarters.

Yesterday's violence marked the worst crisis yet in Israeli-Palestinian relations, which have been faltering since Netanyahu won the parliamentary elections in May. Arafat has warned Israel that a new uprising could erupt if Netanyahu sticks to his hardline positions.



Photo: Reuters

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The clashes in Ramallah began when about 1,000 Palestinians, many of them high school students, marched along the main highway to protest against the completion of the tunnel. When the protesters reached an Israeli army checkpoint south of the city, they began burning tires and throwing stones at soldiers who responded with live ammunition, rubber bullets and tear gas.

AP quoted doctors at Ramallah hospital as saying 148 protesters were treated, most of them for rubber bullet injuries and tear gas inhalation. Three had been wounded by live ammunition, including one who was in a critical condition with a bullet in the chest.

"We don't have enough beds," said the hospital director, Shawki Harb. "We appeal for people to donate blood."

In another incident outside Jerusalem's walled old city, riot police armed with clubs broke up a march led by Palestinian Finance Minister Mohamed Nashashibi and the

chief Muslim cleric of Jerusalem, Ikrama Sabri. "They are criminals," shouted the elderly Nashashibi after he was pushed to the ground by troops. "Netanyahu is an enemy of peace." Sabri was slightly injured by a bottle thrown by a Palestinian protester.

On Salaheddin Street, the eastern sector's main shopping centre, troops chased Palestinian stone-throwers. Three protesters caught by officers were beaten with clubs. Clashes also erupted elsewhere in Arab East Jerusalem and the West Bank towns of Hebron and Bethlehem. And in Gaza City, about 5,000 Palestinian high school students burned an Israeli flag and chanted "Death to the criminal Netanyahu."

The Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas, in a statement released in Beirut, called for a relaunch of the Intifada and urged the Palestinian Authority to halt all self-rule negotiations with Israel. The statement, which was signed by Hamas' Amman spokesman Ibrahim Ghoshe, called on the Palestinian people and the Islamic world "to save Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem and Palestine before it is too late."

Netanyahu, during a visit to Paris yesterday, said the Palestinian protests were caused by disinformation and appealed for a return to calm.

Speaking to reporters after talks with French President Jacques Chirac, Netanyahu said the violence might cause a delay of a day or two in talks planned with the Palestinian National Authority for today. But both sides remained a vital interest in continuing the peace negotiations. "The attempt to portray this as an attack on Arab holy places is totally unfounded, totally incommensurate with the facts and totally incommensurate with our policy of respect for the Islamic holy places," he said.

Arafat's Palestinian National Authority has reacted angrily to the tunnel work, saying Israel was creating facts which would make final status negotiations over the future of Jerusalem futile. Erekat, the Palestinian negotiator, said that if Netanyahu stuck to his hardline positions, "it's going to lead both Israelis and Palestinians back to...disaster and confrontation."

Analysis

The opposite of peace

In the first 100 days of his premiership, Netanyahu has all but destroyed the peace process. War clouds are gathering on the region's horizons, writes **Graham Usher** from Jerusalem

The clashes between Palestinians and Israeli forces that rocked East Jerusalem and Hebron on Tuesday and Wednesday brought to apt expression a week of simmering tensions between Israel and its several Arab "peace" partners.

The Jerusalem protest was sparked by Israel's discreet opening of the night before of a 488-metre tunnel, ostensibly to enable tourists to "view archaeological sites" beneath the Wailing Wall. The tunnel burrows under Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque, occupied by Israel in the 1967 war, whose eventual ownership is exposed to be resolved in Oslo's final status negotiations. Al-Aqsa Mosque is Islam's third holiest shrine after the Kaaba in Mecca and the Prophet Mohamed's Mosque in Medina, both in Saudi Arabia. Palestinians view constructions like the tunnel as pre-empting Jerusalem's final status as an exclusively Jewish City, which is why hundreds stormed the tunnel's new entrance. Israeli border police forces responded by briefly sealing off the Wall and firing rubber bullets and tear gas at the protesters, injuring several.

In Hebron, around 500 Palestinians demonstrated for the second time in eight days to demand the opening of the city's vegetable market, in line with the Israel-PLO interim agreement signed last year. The Israeli army broke up the protest, arresting four Palestinians and beating others, including Palestinian Legislative Council member Hanan Ashrawi.

The violence inside the Occupied Territories coincided with a return to hostilities in occupied South Lebanon. Between 19-23 September, a series of skirmishes left two Israeli soldiers and five Lebanese guerrillas dead. As a backdrop, Syria quietly but visibly deployed around 17,000 of its estimated 35,000 troops in Lebanon from Beirut to the Bekaa Valley and, ominously for Israel, the northern slopes of Mount Hermon. The southern slopes are within the Israeli occupied Golan Heights and the site of the Israeli army's main early warning station. On 23 September, Lebanon joined the fray, its radio announcing the movement of hundreds of Lebanese

soldiers to just north of the occupied zone.

The Likud government greeted these latest turns in the "peace" process with official contempt. On the Jerusalem protests, the city's Likud mayor, Ehud Olmert, insisted that matters like excavating the Dome of the Rock were "not subject to political negotiations because Israel was sovereign in the city." Israel's army chief of staff, Amnon Shahak, said that the loss of two Israeli soldiers in a single day in South Lebanon should not be described as an "escalation". He refrained from saying what it should be called. As for the Syrian troop movements, Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed them as so much psychological pressure designed to force Israel into making "unilateral concessions to which Syria had become habituated with the previous government."

But not all Israelis are so complacent. "The prime minister sees one picture," said leader of the opposition Meretz bloc, Yossi Sarid, on 17 September, "and I see a completely different one. We are on the threshold of a conflict with Syria; there is a rift between us and Egypt with the Palestinians, a crisis of confidence; with the Arab world, stalemate... The Middle East is tenser than it has been for years and you, prime minister, say be calm."

In fact, Israel is not "calm" about the current crisis, official rhetoric aside. According to assessments from Israel's military intelligence, Syria's new concentration of forces in Lebanon, if maintained, has increased the risk of war between the two countries from "very slight" to "no longer improbable". There are two reasons for this, say sources.

First, while Syria's movement of soldiers to the Bekaa may be viewed as defensive, its positioning on Mount Hermon enables its army to undertake a surprise attack on the Golan — a rehearsal of the Syrian commando assaults which, together with Egypt's recapture of the Suez Canal, kicked off the 1973 October War. The second reason is that the presence of so many Syrian and Lebanese troops in and around South Lebanon heightens the risk of their "entanglement" in Israel's war against

Hizbullah. It is a miscalculation Israel would appear to wish to avoid, but, as former army chief of staff and Labour member of parliament Ehud Barak warned on 18 September, "It is very easy to miscalculate."

Easier still when every Israeli politician — including Netanyahu — understands the political message behind Syria's military manoeuvres in Lebanon. It was spelled out by ex-premier Shimon Peres at a special session of the Knesset on 17 September. "Netanyahu came up with the brilliant idea of Lebanon First, which immediately dissolved," said Peres. "It says to [Syrian President Assad]: We have a headache in Lebanon, help us; you have a headache in the Golan Heights, stick with it. Anyone who thinks that Syria will give up on the entire Golan Heights and will leave Lebanon because it heard there is a new government in Israel is propagating baseless illusions."

Netanyahu knows that to ease the tension in Lebanon he will have to resume negotiations with Syria. Syria has made it crystal clear that any resumption must be grounded on the understandings reached with the previous Israeli government, namely peace in return for Israel's withdrawal from the "entire Golan Heights". Netanyahu says he is prepared to "examine ideas presented" in the past, but that his government will not be bound by them. Syria's response is to ready its army in Lebanon. For good reason: if there are no negotiations, there is no likelihood of peace; and if there is no peace, then there is its opposite — war and the potential for war.

One hundred days into his governance, Netanyahu appears unable to grasp this simple equation. The ill wind his government has whipped up in Damascus, Cairo, Jerusalem and Hebron is due to Netanyahu's conviction that he and Likud can maintain a de facto posture of no war and no peace. The post-Madrid and post-Oslo reality, however, is that it is going to be either peace with the Arabs or war with them, but that both, for Israel, will come at a price.

KURASAT ISTRATIJIYA (41)



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Mystery death in London police hands

Mystery continues to shroud the death of an Egyptian graduate student after being taken into custody by the London police. But, as **Abdallah Abdel-Salam** reports from the British capital, a political connection has been ruled out



Nearly six weeks after the death in police custody of Ahmed Mohamed El-Gammal, an Egyptian studying for a PhD in London, the circumstances of his death remain a mystery. However, El-Gammal's uncle, a professor at the University of London, has ruled out the possibility that he might have been targeted by foreign "quarters", as some press reports have suggested. And a spokesman for the Egyptian consulate in London insisted that the case "has no political dimension."

El-Gammal was arrested on 12 August. Police sources said officers had gone to a house, whose nature the police did not specify, to investigate a complaint from the occupants that an assault was in progress. El-Gammal, the 33-year-old assailant, was taken into custody.

According to the police, a police physician determined that El-Gammal's condition did not require hospital treatment, and he was taken to the police station. But at 3.25am, he collapsed in his cell. First aid was administered while waiting for an ambulance, but he died 20 minutes later. A post-mortem examination the following morning established that the death was the result of heart failure.

Richard Offer, a spokesman for Police Complaints Authority, an independent body responsible for investigating complaints against the police, said the investigation of El-Gammal's death would continue for another 70 days. "The investigation is still in its early stages and it is difficult to draw any conclusions," he said.

It emerged that the alleged assault and the arrest had taken place at a vicarage, and that the vicar had been the target of the assault. But the Police Complaints Authority spokesman declined to divulge details of the vicar's testimony.

The student's uncle, Abdel-Latif El-Gammal, a professor of Arabic literary criticism at the University of London, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he was informed by police of his nephew's death on the evening of 13 August. The uncle quoted police as saying that his nephew, who had no previous acquaintance with the vicar, had knocked on the door of the vicarage, made his way inside and began wrecking the furniture. In an ensuing argument, the student broke the vicar's nose.

The two policemen who went to the vicarage were themselves assaulted by El-Gammal, but managed to overpower and arrest him. A doctor who examined both the vicar and the El-Gammal ordered the former to be taken to hospital, but allowed police to take the latter into custody on the grounds that his condition did not require hospital treatment.

The uncle said that police had informed him that the death was the result of heart failure. However he did not believe that the death was due to natural causes because his nephew did not have a heart condition.

According to the professor, Ahmed El-Gammal came to London in 1989 after obtaining a degree in science from Menoufia University in 1986. He married a British woman in 1992, obtained an MA from Queen Mary's College in 1994 and then began working for a PhD in pure mathematics at London's City University. A distinguished student, El-Gammal had been given a full scholarship and was expected to finish his doctorate in two years, the professor said.

Asked about the student's relationship with the vicar, the professor said that he believed the two men did not know each other. "But it is possible that the vicar was trying to make it up between Ahmed and his wife, whose marriage had broken up 18 months earlier."

But why had he attacked him? "Perhaps an argument broke out between them for reasons unknown to us," the professor responded.

Another possibility, he added, was that his nephew was being followed and had entered the vicar's house to hide from his pursuers. He said that El-Gammal had repeatedly mentioned to him that he was being followed.

So could El-Gammal have been targeted by foreign "quarters", as some press reports have suggested, because he specialised in pure mathematics and, possibly, nuclear science? "No," the professor replied. "Ahmed was simply a student. He hadn't made any scientific discoveries. So I rule out this possibility. Perhaps, there are personal matters that are unknown to us."

In the professor's view, the case "has no racist overtones. My objective is to establish the reasons for Ahmed's death, whether it was deliberate or the result of negligence."

He claimed the police had made contradictory statements, retracting their original account, which said that Ahmed had been examined by a doctor before being taken to the police station, and instead saying that he had not seen a doctor.

The professor said he saw no reason to question the police's assertion that there was no prior acquaintance between Ahmed and the vicar. "However, the way Ahmed was treated did not seem to be normal. The truth needs to be found out."

Piara Power, chairman of West Ham Monitoring Project, a group that defends minorities, said the group was providing the uncle with legal assistance to unravel the mysteries of the case. "The group has established that Ahmed was a man of character and serious in his work. The group will support the uncle of the deceased until the truth is established and until the culprits — if there are any — are brought to justice," Power said.

A spokesman for the Egyptian Consulate in London said the consulate was in constant contact with the uncle as well as the investigating authorities. "This is the first time that such a misfortune has befallen an Egyptian citizen in London and it is in everybody's interest to establish the truth," the spokesman said.

Despite the mystery that continues to shroud the case, he insisted that "it has no political dimension whatsoever."

The spokesman suggested two possibilities: either Ahmed's death was natural and the result of heart failure, or police had overstepped their limits and used violence against him. "We need to know the real reasons behind the death of a man who had no previous heart condition," the spokesman said. In cases of police violence, it was particularly important that the individuals responsible should be brought to justice, the spokesman added.

He denied that "foreign hands" were involved in the case, which he described as an "individual incident."

Minister of Education Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin is in the limelight once again, as debate rages over the new private universities, and state universities open their doors to double their usual quota of high school graduates. He talked exclusively with Amira Howeid



Education in transition

Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin has been minister of education for the past five years. He is known for taking daring and often highly controversial decisions, such as the unification of school uniforms which prohibited girls from wearing the veil in primary schools and the nighab in the universities. And, in order to upgrade secondary school education, he introduced a new two-year system for the secondary school certificate. In the following interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Bahaeddin expresses confidence that state-run universities will be able to handle a record number of students this academic year, but voices the view that additional criteria are needed for the newly-established private universities.

You were quoted as saying that this year's large number of secondary school graduates will be easily absorbed by the state universities. How is that possible? Did you appoint additional teaching staff? We do not have a shortage of university teaching staff; in fact, we have more than we need in some fields. The shortage exists in rare specialisations only, but generally we don't have a problem.

We only want to make the best use of the available human resources. In some departments, there are more than 40 professors and only 10 of them actually teach the students. The number of enrolling students this year has been determined by the Higher Council for Universities, and we did not force the universities to accept a burden which they could not cope with.

But the scientific equipment in the applied science faculties has not been upgraded for years; so how can they handle such a large number of students? Over the past three years, President Hosni Mubarak gave us an additional LE150 million over and above our fixed budget to finance laboratories and libraries, purchase computers and other equipment. The state has never been tight with money as far as we are concerned.

But educational experts complain that, compared to other countries, not enough money is being spent on education. The education budget has increased dramatically. Allocations for education in the second five-year social-economic development plan amounted to LE2.6 billion but rose to LE11.8 billion in the third plan. The education budget in 1981 was less than LE2 billion. This year it rose to LE12.1 billion. Thus we can see that there has been a large increase in spending.

We should note that the education budget amounts to 6.3 per cent of the national income, which is not a small percentage by any means.

The past few years witnessed a number of radical changes in the educational system, leading to irregular situations such as having two secondary school certificates and two school years joined in one. Why does the ministry's policy seem so unstable? It is likely that systems will overlap during tran-

sitional periods, and this is what we have here. A law was passed for a new *thanaweya amma* and this change could not be made overnight. So there has to be a transitional period until 1997 so that we can apply this new law properly. After that, there will be one system only.

As for the other foreign certificates, they exist because we have foreign language schools and we cannot prevent students from studying in those schools. Thus we have the IGCSE, the American Diploma and the German Abitur. This happens all over the world, not only in Egypt. We don't suffer from dualism in our state schools.

But this system has created a delicate situation in which the less affluent study for the difficult Egyptian *thanaweya amma* while the wealthy go for the easier foreign certificates. The *thanaweya amma* certificate has been developed to be just as easy. The year is divided into terms and students can choose what they want to study, which is the same basic principle

"It is likely that systems will overlap during transitional periods, and this is what we have here. A law was passed for a new thanaweya amma and this change could not be made overnight. So there has to be a transitional period until 1997 so that we can apply this new law properly"



as the foreign certificates. This is why the *thanaweya amma* is easier now and it explains the high marks obtained by many students this year.

Because of these high marks, there seems to be a trend to force the students to enroll in higher institutes instead of universities. No, this is not true. The rate of registration in institutes is the same as last year. As a matter of fact, the chances of joining a top faculty in a top university have improved. In some departments, the rate of student acceptance has increased by 80 per cent.

After the cabinet approved the establishment of four private universities, the prime minister formed a committee to evaluate their performance. Why hasn't it started work? The committee was formed for one purpose and that was to study a plan which was submitted for the establishment of private universities in compliance with the law. The committee met and approved the establishment of four private universities. After that, during a cabinet meeting, the president said that we have to be careful and must have an opportunity to evaluate the performance of the four universities. He also said that certain criteria must be laid down and, right now, we are in the process of doing this.

So the role of this committee was limited to evaluating plans on paper? Many have voiced concern because the law did not set a ceiling on the profits the universities will be allowed to make. What is your comment? I share the same concern because, historically, all the profit-making educational institutes in the advanced countries have failed. And all the centres of excellence in the universities in the advanced countries are non-profit organisations that depend on donations and endowments. That is why we should be guided by those experiences.

What sort of authority does the Ministry of Education have over private universities? Article 18 of the Constitution stipulates that the state should supervise all forms of education. Accordingly, the state, which is represented by the Ministry of Education has the right to supervise everything, including private universities.

Another point here is that the Higher Council for Universities is the only authority able to extend official recognition to educational certificates. The Council will evaluate these certificates in the light of objective criteria. If these criteria are not met, the certificates will not be recognised.

There is also a ministry representative on the boards of the private universities, who will provide the ministry with periodical reports on their activities. If necessary, we can, according to the constitution, intervene.

The president of Cairo University was quoted as saying that there was no need to rush into approving the establishment of four private universities at the same time and that the government should have been less hasty.

What is your comment? Everyone has the right to express his view. I cannot voice an opinion because I am supposed to be a neutral party. But the president of Cairo University has a point of view that should be taken seriously.

The head of the Doctors' Syndicate also announced last week that the syndicate will not open its doors to the graduates of private universities or grant them licences to practice medicine. What is your think?

This is his position and he is responsible for it. He is not affiliated to the ministry.

But what do you think of what he said? The issue is whether the Higher Council for Universities will recognise the certificates of those universities. This will determine whether the graduates of private medical schools will be allowed to practise medicine.

No one will be able to practise medicine unless the Higher Council for Universities recognises his certificate, after which the Ministry of Health would grant him a licence and the Doctors' Syndicate would grant him another licence.

All these steps are inter-related and I don't share the same fear expressed by the head of the Doctors' Syndicate.

The decision-makers in this entire process appear to be the investors who established these universities, and not the Ministry of Education.

The investors have to provide all the basic requirements and if they don't, then the universities will fail. Anyone in this position has to study all the possibilities seriously.

We were not pressured and we have nothing to do with the investors. We acted in accordance with the law and simply did our job. Our mandate was clear.

Education Minister Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin. "We had to change the system in order to produce students who do not merely commit lessons to memory to pass an examination but who are able to think on their own."

Bahaeddin conceded that "never before have the universities accepted such a large number of students." But he expressed confidence that "the universities will be able to cope and any resulting problems will be solved."

Moufid Shehab, president of Cairo University, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "There is no doubt that the large number of students joining the universities this year is a problem. We are doing all that we can to deal with it, but it is going to take a great effort."

Amongst the measures being undertaken are extra lectures, "although this will add to the burden of professors who will have to deliver the

same lecture more than once." New buildings and annexes have been opened and large exam halls will be used for lectures, Shehab said.

He conceded that "in science faculties, such as the Faculty of Medicine, where practical work is a prerequisite, students will face difficulties since many of them will not have the chance of actual practice."

Faculties of medicine in which 2,500 students enrolled last year will have to absorb as many as 10,000 students this year.

Ahmed Samir, a medical student in his second year, described some of the negative consequences of the swelling numbers. "We do not have the opportunity to get involved in practical work. There is not enough equipment or chemicals for all of us. Many students listen to a professor's lecture sitting on the floor. It is a sad situation."

And Lobna Ahmed, who studies English literature at Cairo University, said: "Sometimes we cannot find an empty room where we can take the lecture. So, it is either cancelled or postponed."

Abdel-Wahab Abdel-Hafez, president of Ain Shams University, said that, like in Cairo University, the number of lectures will be increased and new buildings will be opened.

"We are committed to a national duty," Abdel-Hafez said. "We have to consider this year and the last as a transitional phase which we have to cope with."

Universities crammed as systems overlap

A cartoon in an Arabic-language newspaper shows thousands of students cramming into the Cairo Stadium. They were there not to watch a soccer game but to listen to a professor's lecture.

This academic year, the nation's 12 state-run universities opened their doors to 265,000 secondary school graduates — the highest number ever. The enrolling freshmen were graduates of two secondary school systems — 201,308 graduated from the new system this year and 141,470 from the old.

Students graduating from the old system were leftovers from the previous year, when they had failed the *thanaweya amma* examinations or had not achieved the necessary scores to enroll at university. These students were unable to join the new system because it divides the *thanaweya amma* into two years. About 19,000 students are expected to follow the old system again next year.

Universities were already bulging at the seams with the 231,000 new students they had to accept last year. That was due to a government decision back in 1989 to combine the classes of the fifth and sixth primary school grades. As a result, those who completed their primary education in 1989, and their secondary education last year, were double the usual number.

Another feature of the new academic year is that although it officially started last Saturday, about 170,000 freshmen are still waiting to find out which faculty they will be enrolled in by the

National universities are crammed this academic year, with graduates of two secondary school systems enrolling. Shaden Shehab investigates



maktab al-tawseef (coordination office). Because of the numbers of students, this process is likely to continue until mid-October. Under government regulations, students submit their secondary school certificates, along with a list of the faculties which they would like to join, in an order of preference. The coordination office then places each student in a certain faculty, not necessarily that of his choice, on the basis of his total examinations score as well as geographic proximity to that faculty.

The new *thanaweya amma* system was introduced in 1994 with the aim of upgrading secondary school education. Unlike the old system where a student's results depended on one final examination, the new system gives the student several chances to improve his or her grades.

"It is not fair that a student's future be determined by one end-of-year examination," said

same lecture more than once." New buildings and annexes have been opened and large exam halls will be used for lectures, Shehab said.

He conceded that "in science faculties, such as the Faculty of Medicine, where practical work is a prerequisite, students will face difficulties since many of them will not have the chance of actual practice."

Faculties of medicine in which 2,500 students enrolled last year will have to absorb as many as 10,000 students this year.

Ahmed Samir, a medical student in his second year, described some of the negative consequences of the swelling numbers. "We do not have the opportunity to get involved in practical work. There is not enough equipment or chemicals for all of us. Many students listen to a professor's lecture sitting on the floor. It is a sad situation."

And Lobna Ahmed, who studies English literature at Cairo University, said: "Sometimes we cannot find an empty room where we can take the lecture. So, it is either cancelled or postponed."

Abdel-Wahab Abdel-Hafez, president of Ain Shams University, said that, like in Cairo University, the number of lectures will be increased and new buildings will be opened.

"We are committed to a national duty," Abdel-Hafez said. "We have to consider this year and the last as a transitional phase which we have to cope with."

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An eye for an eye

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fired the first shot in a protracted war of words between Egypt and Israel when he said Egypt would be "cutting off its nose to spite its face" by threatening to cancel or postpone the third Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference (MENA III). The response was unprecedented in Egyptian-Israeli relations since the two nations signed a peace treaty in 1979.

"Stay away from Egypt's nose", "This language is disgusting" and "Netanyahu needs to seek psychiatric help", was the counter attack by senior Egyptian diplomats, led by Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. Although Moussa was away in New York this week, his aides kept the exchange of words ablaze, compelling Israel to make an official protest.

Assistant Foreign Minister Fathi El-Shazli on Monday described recent Israeli statements as "the language of dinosaurs" because they prohibit the creation of a Palestinian state. "[This] completely opposes the logic of our times, especially since Israel is a partner in the peace process. This language is disgusting." He continued that Israeli officials were issuing "war cries", adding that Netanyahu's government did not realise the "dangers of sinking the peace process because of its dangerous and negative acts."

Adel El-Safi, another assistant foreign minister, said that Netanyahu suffered from paranoia about Israel's security, suggesting that it could only be resolved by a psychiatrist, not at the negotiating table. "This pathological fear over [Israel's] security needs a psychiatrist," El-Safi said.

Egypt's Ambassador to Israel Mohamed Bassiouni was summoned by Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy on Tuesday to express Israel's "extreme concern" about Cairo's onslaught on the person of Netanyahu. "Egypt must do away with this new manner of action which revolts every Israeli citizen," Levy told reporters after the meeting. He

continued that it would be "difficult" to believe that Egypt was willing to forfeit its role in the peace process, especially in view of President Hosni Mubarak's commitment to the process.

And he told Israel Radio: "The Egyptian government cannot play a role in the peace process if the attacks of recent days continue."

In response, Bassiouni assured that Egypt's policy and strategy were for peace, adding that Egypt hoped Israel would fulfil its commitments, "so the Palestinian people will feel tangible results on the ground."

Bassiouni had called Israel's Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh on Monday to clarify the running commentary coming out of Cairo, arguing that the statements were taken out of context by the media. But Naveh was not convinced. "We are very concerned and explanations provided to date by Mr. Bassiouni are insufficient," Naveh told Israel Radio. Naveh believes the declarations from Cairo are part of "a general attempt by foreign officials to pressure the [Israeli] government" into making concessions in the peace process. He warned that the war of words would "only have the opposite effect."

Netanyahu began the wheel turning with his own famous "nose" remark, and appears to be continuing the verbal war. "We must follow with caution any movement of forces," Netanyahu said of Egypt's recent grand-scale military exercises Badr '96. "We are certainly not sitting back carefree regarding certain possibilities."

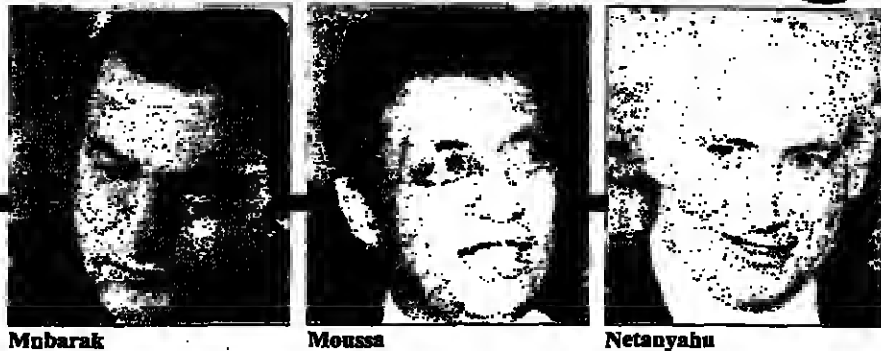
Last Sunday President Hosni Mubarak expressed

surprise that Netanyahu had made an issue out of the exercises. After listening to a report on the 10-day war games, Mubarak suggested that "if [Netanyahu] is worried, he should call and we will talk frankly."

The exercises included the use of chemical warfare units and a simulated crossing of the Suez Canal, and, according to Defence Minister Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, made preparations for war against a neighbouring country "possessing weapons of mass destruction." The remark was interpreted as referring to Israel and its nuclear arsenal.

"After 17 years at peace with us, Egypt is talking about military manoeuvres in preparation for war against a neighbouring state and of the military option," Netanyahu said. "This is not a sign of peaceful relations." However, Mubarak confirmed that Egypt respects its peace treaty with Israel, adding that Israel should not be concerned about the military exercises.

But Netanyahu would not let the matter rest. He reportedly fumed over Cairo's statements for an hour during a 90-minute meeting with US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross last Sunday. Netanyahu said that Cairo "had crossed every line" with its threatening statements and military manoeuvres.



Mubarak

Moussa

Netanyahu

This week's diplomatic anti-Netanyahu campaign also surpassed the press campaign begun by some of the opposition newspapers when Netanyahu came to power. Israel's new prime minister was nicknamed 'Neten', the Arabic word for 'rotten'.

Egypt feels strongly about Israel's footdragging now, because the whole peace process is at stake, and, according to Moussa, could be destroyed. Israel is accused of reneging on its agreements with the Palestinians and stalling the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, as well as escalating tensions in the region. Egypt has demanded that Israel withdraw from Hebron, resume final status negotiations with the Palestinians, ease the closure of the Occupied Territories, resume negotiations on the Syrian track and stop putting forward proposals for partial solutions like 'Lebanon First'.

In an interview a few days ago, Moussa questioned Israel's intentions for peace. "Israel wants security without a Palestinian state, and without a total withdrawal from the Golan Heights or Lebanon," Moussa told the Saudi daily *Asharq Al-Awsat* on Tuesday. "Israel wants peace? This is nonsense. Whoever believes that this can be possible is either ignorant or crazy."

Adding that Netanyahu was "neither ignorant or crazy," Moussa continued that the Israeli prime minister "must consider these policies of his before the situation gets to a very dangerous phase." He sees that "the biggest danger is if [Netanyahu] remains dogmatic."

It is believed that Netanyahu feels he can continue antagonising the Arabs, especially now that MENA III has been secured. Observers go as far as claiming that Netanyahu probably procured a green light for his actions from the US during his second visit to Washington earlier this month. They point out the vast differences between Netanyahu's tone after his July visit to the US, when he returned to the region "committed to the peace process", and his actions in recent weeks.

Speeding up justice

To expedite the administration of justice, additional benches are being established in the nation's highest court. **Mona El-Nahas reports**

To speed up the processing of an ever-increasing pile of lawsuits, the Court of Cassation decided last week to add seven new benches, raising the total number to 28. About 25 counsellors and judges will be appointed to fill the seats on the new benches, judicial sources said.

Apart from the Supreme Constitutional Court, which rules on the constitutionality of laws, the Court of Cassation is the nation's highest court and an appellant's last resort. It has the prerogative to consider appeals against a lower court's decision, if the appellant has cited an alleged error in the application of the law. Its rulings are final and usually constitute a legal precedent.

According to Mohamed Eid, a Court of Cassation counsellor, the number of appeals filed with the court exceeds 30,000 annually. "Since we only have 170 judges and counsellors, it is not an easy job to do all this work," he said.

Increasing the number of benches, a move welcomed by legal experts, would make the accomplishment of this work easier, said counsellor Medhat El-Maraghi, the court's chief justice. But Eid also suggested that only appeals "which have significance" should be accepted by the court.

The problem of the accumulating number of lawsuits is not confined to the Court of Cassation but is endemic to courts across the nation. Many lawsuits drag on for years. Plaintiffs or defendants may file before the court reaches a decision, or a decision is reached so late that it loses its significance.

Lawyer Amr Salem says the problem is not due only to the shortage of judges but also to the "bureaucratic mentality and lethargy of the courts' administrative staff. Authenticating a single document usually takes a long time and lawyers, seeking to acquire information from staff, are likely to be confronted with obstacles."

These problems need to be addressed, Salem said. He also underlined the need to computerise the court system, not only to speed up the litigation process but also to ensure that valuable documents are safely kept.

Sayed Abu Zeid, another lawyer, agreed that increasing the number of benches was not a complete solution. What was needed was a simplification of the litigation process, which at present forced justice to proceed at a snail's pace, he said.

Abu Zeid also suggested setting up non-governmental arbitration committees, comprising former judges and counsellors, to rule on civil disputes. Many civil cases could thus bypass the courts, sharply reducing the pressure on the judiciary. Litigants could take their dispute to court, as a last resort, only if they failed to reach an out-of-court settlement, he added.

According to Abu Zeid, "greedy lawyers" should also take some of the blame for the delay. "They resort to procrastination, thus wasting valuable time, in order to make more money," he said.

The solution recommended by Abdel-Rahman Mohamed, chief justice of the Tanta Court of First Instance, was to increase the number of judges throughout the system. "But this is by no means easy," he said. "The choice of judges is subject to scientific, social and personal criteria."

Mohamed said that "only a limited number of law graduates are qualified to work in the judiciary." Listing the prerequisites, he said that "in addition to being honest, respectable and of a good social standing, judges should have experience as prosecutors of not less than seven years. And before assuming the post, the judge should have taken extensive courses in judicial studies."

Egypt has only one Court of Cassation but eight Courts of Appeal and around 22 Courts of First Instance.



QUEEN SILVIA of Sweden and Jordan's Queen Nur took part in a meeting on Tuesday on the non-governmental organisation Mentor which specialises in the fight against

drugs. Mentor, which cooperates with the World Health Organisation (WHO), has taken charge of projects to help street children in developing countries. Queen Silvia said Mentor would

work in Egypt in coordination with an Arab organisation for children's welfare, chaired by Talal ibn Abdel-Aziz, a brother of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia

Malpractice in privatisation bonanza

The government's decision to investigate a top industrialist for alleged corruption has brought into question the effectiveness of parliamentary supervision of the privatisation programme. **Gamal Essam El-Din reports**

A cabinet announcement confirmed for the first time this week that Abdel-Wahhab El-Habbak, former chairman of the Holding Company for Engineering Industries (HCEI), one of 17 government-owned holding companies, was being investigated for alleged financial malpractice.

Following the announcement Habbak was remanded in police custody for 15 days, pending investigation by public prosecution authorities. Earlier, the judicial investigators ordered Habbak banned from travelling abroad as far back as last June.

The statement was issued in response to reports in national as well as opposition newspapers accusing Habbak of receiving hefty commissions, which he deposited in foreign banks, in return for a variety of administrative irregularities. One report claimed that Habbak returned his freedom as part of a secret deal with the government, under which he reimbursed it \$19 million that he transferred back to Egypt from Swiss banks.

Habbak had served as chairman of El-Nasr Electrical and Electronic Apparatus Company (Philips) between 1975 and 1985. He was promoted afterwards to chair the Public Sector Organisation for Engineering Industries, of which Philips is a subsidiary. After he was elected to parliament, he was chosen by the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) to head the industrial committee of the People's Assembly. In 1991,

he was chosen to head HCEI after the government decided to convert the old public sector organisations into holding companies as part of a large IMF-sponsored privatisation programme.

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, in a statement published by the opposition newspaper *Al-Wafd*, vowed that "there will be no cover up for corruption and no protection for any official, regardless of his position, who tampers with state funds."

Ganzouri said the corruption charges for which Habbak was being investigated date back to the years when he, as chairman of Philips, had a free hand in running the purchase operations of the company which is jointly owned by the public sector and Philips International of Holland. Investigators, Ganzouri added, established that Habbak was guilty of several irregularities and Habbak responded by reimbursing the government the \$19 million. Investigators demanded additional reimbursements, but Habbak refused, forcing the government to take legal action against him, Ganzouri said. He disclosed that the investigation was being carried out by the "Illicit Earnings Office."

Reports in the Arabic-language press accused Habbak of making use of his former post as HCEI chairman to appropriate the amount of \$23 million in "privatisation commissions." As an example, the reports claimed, Habbak was paid "millions of dollars" for awarding a foreign company the purchase bid of a public sector com-

pany, presumably at an under-rated price. The reports also said that Habbak's secret accounts in foreign banks, amounting to \$50 million, were reported to the authorities by his divorcee.

According to the reports, Habbak was also accused by investigators of taking illegal commissions on a \$35 million USAID privatisation grant, devoted to conducting a better evaluation of public sector companies and assets put up for sale. This grant had not gone well with many members of parliament when it came up for debate for the first time in March 1994. At the time, deputies asked the Ministry of International Cooperation to submit to the house a clear and detailed statement on the disbursement items of this grant. Later, People's Assembly Speaker Ahmed Fathi Sorour announced that he had entrusted the Central Auditing Agency (CAA) with investigating the disbursement items of the grant. But the results of this investigation were never announced.

Reacting to these reports, El-Badri Farhali, a member of parliament, announced that he would direct an interpellation — a question that must be answered — to Atef Ebeid, minister of the public business sector, about irregularities in the privatisation programme once parliament reconvenes in November.

Habbak's case raised question marks about the effectiveness of parliament in supervising the privatisation of the public sector. Although dep-

uties have the legal right to direct questions and interpellations to cabinet ministers, this right was considered an inadequate control tool by many parliamentary researchers and professors of constitutional law.

According to Mustafa El-Said, chairman of the Assembly's Economic Affairs Committee, which was the scene of hot debates of the USAID privatisation grant, the case of Habbak revived the questions not only about how the grant was disbursed but also about the entire privatisation programme. "Since this grant was discussed in the Assembly for the first time in 1994, the committee has not been able to receive any clear reports on how it was spent," El-Said said. "Neither do we have an idea about the results of the CAA's investigation."

According to El-Said, cases such as Habbak's are usually investigated by the Administrative Control Authority (ACA). But the Assembly, he complained, is not entitled to get these reports directly.

Cabinet ministers and high officials would not respond speedily and in a straightforward manner to questions directed by MPs on privatisation and other issues raised by the press, suggested El-Said. "Their answers are usually elusive and incomplete which undermines the ability of MPs to exercise control over the government's performance and uncover shady practices, like those of Habbak, at an early stage," he said.

Museum security goes high-tech

THE EGYPTIAN Museum in central Cairo acquired a high-tech security system this week, after a young burglar almost managed to walk out with priceless items from Tutankhamun's collection two weeks ago, reports Nevine El-Aref. "In the past, we relied on guards for security, but this is obviously inadequate," said the museum's director, Mohamed Saleh.

The burglar, Amr Sabri, had spent the night at the museum and was stopped by guards on the morning of 11 September, moments before making his way out with the priceless artefacts.

Saleh said the new system includes fixed and mobile cameras, linked to a closed-circuit television, keeping the museum, its gardens, the roof and the surrounding streets under close surveillance. The cameras are operated by guards in a temporary control room, while the finishing touches are being added to a permanent control room in the museum's

basement. An early warning system and a burglar alarm have also been installed at the museum, Saleh said, and the museum's old wooden gates have been replaced with iron gates.

After the museum is closed to the public, the museum's halls and corridors will be patrolled by trained dogs, making it impossible for would-be thieves to remain undetected inside, Saleh said.

Extra security measures have been enforced on the second floor hall where the Tutankhamun collection is on display. They include a coded electronic device fitted to the hall's iron door. The display cases will soon be replaced by new unbreakable ones, which will be equipped with ventilation facilities to ensure the best preservation of the items, he said.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**



photo: Sherif Sobol

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Cotton-picking story

IN THE BOUTIQUES of New York, Milan and London, designer dress shirts made of Egyptian cotton retail for as much as \$200. And while Egyptian cotton farmers see only a small percentage of this profit, they, like this Menoufiya governorate family, rely heavily on the export of this cash crop for their yearly revenue.

As a result, come harvest-time, the whole family turns out to help pick the crop. During the school holidays, children of all ages work alongside their parents and neighbours to gather the cotton and, as proven necessary over the past few years, wage an all-out war against the boll worms that threaten to destroy the crop.

This year's harvest is a milestone event for Egypt. The government, in cooperation with farmers and agricultural experts, introduced a bevy of agricultural reforms aimed at increasing the harvest yield and the area cultivated for cotton from 720,000 feddans to 920,000 feddans. The result, farmers, after last year's crop failure, may this year be smiling a little wider as they head for the bank.



Photo: Sherif Saad

Correcting a willful misreading

Who owns the endowments? A new joint committee meeting this week brings fresh hope to the resolution of an old problem, Mariz Tadros reports

A new joint committee of the Egyptian Association for Awqaf (religious endowments) and the Coptic Association for Awqaf is to meet next Saturday to discuss Coptic grievances over the confiscation of property formerly belonging to the Coptic body.

The Coptic Association for Awqaf was established in 1960 to supervise the Church's charitable endowments. It was followed in 1971 by the Egyptian Association for Awqaf, established to regulate Islamic endowments under the auspices of the Ministry of Awqaf. The Coptic Orthodox Church claims that, since its establishment, the Egyptian Awqaf has illegally confiscated property and land which was donated to the Coptic Association.

In an exclusive interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Minister of Awqaf Mahmoud Zakzouk said that despite the fact that four previous joint committees — which had met under the direction of the former minister of awqaf — were unfruitful, he was confident that an agreement could be reached this time around. "The issue, as I told Pope Shenouda, is that we want to reach a solution which will pacify our Coptic brothers in Egypt. This is why [Prime Minister] Ganzouri asked me to form a combined committee."

The issue of the 1,550 feddans of confiscated land has caused much resentment amongst Copts. Fayek Fahim, Pope Shenouda's legal adviser and a member of the Coptic delegation to the committee, said that the only solution to this 25-year-old problem would be the return of the confiscated land to the Coptic Awqaf.

The right of the Coptic Orthodox Church to administer its own endowments with no outside interference was guaranteed in Law 264 of 1960, which established the Coptic Awqaf. Fahim explained that the land reform laws of the 1950s had resulted in a need to officially draw the boundaries of church property. It was this which led to the Coptic Awqaf's establishment.

According to Law 264, the Coptic Patriarchate, dioceses, monasteries, convents, churches and educational institutions are each entitled to receive up to 200 feddans of land in endowments.

When the Egyptian Association for the Awqaf was established 11 years later, under Law 84 of 1971, the law stressed that Coptic endowments were outside its jurisdiction. "By confiscating *awqaf* land that belonged to the Coptic Awqaf, the Egyptian Association for Awqaf has blatantly violated Law 264 and Law 84," charged Fahim.

The minister acknowledged that he was aware of the resentment caused by the confiscations: "Sometimes I receive letters from some of our Coptic brothers abroad, abusing me, asking me 'how can you seize Copts' endowments? You are unjust.' I don't get upset because I understand that they are frustrated."

However, according to Zakzouk, the confiscations were not without legal grounds. "There was a *farwa* issued by the General Assembly of the Administrative Court which stipulates that when the donor allocated endowments for the poor in general — then it would come under the Egyptian Association for Awqaf. It was this *farwa*, said the minister, that provided the legal basis for the confiscation of 98 out of the total of 235 Coptic endowments in Egypt. The last confiscation was in 1989.

The minister concedes that this *farwa* is at the heart of the legal dispute. It will, he said, be discussed by legal experts on the committee. "But there will be no friction; it is merely an appraisal of the problem and ways of solving it," he said. "It must be made clear that the *farwa* bears no legal weight today," argued Fahim. "It was issued before the establishment of either the Coptic, or Egyptian, *awqaf*. The laws establishing the two associations made the *farwa* null and void, because both laws recognised the autonomy of the Coptic Association of Awqaf to administer its own endowments."

But while the *farwa* targeted cases of general charity, the Coptic Awqaf made "no mention of how to regulate such cases in its law of establishment," said Zakzouk. "In discussions with Pope Shenouda, he explained to me that as a symbol of the spirit of co-operation and fraternity, Copts who left endowments did not specify that they should benefit only the 'Coptic poor', but always allocated them to 'the poor' in general, with no reference to the denomination of the beneficiary. Of course we appreciate this as an expression of the spirit of unity and reconciliation. The donor is not discriminating against anyone; the only characteristic required of the beneficiary is that he is a poor Egyptian. Don't forget that 10 mosques were donated by Copts."

In Fahim's view, using the lack of denominational specification in Coptic donors' wills as a reason to appropriate their donations is a deliberate misunderstanding of their intentions. "In this respect, the Court of Cassation has been very definite, stressing that the overall meaning and underlying objective of the donor's will must be the base on which endowments are allocated according to law," he stressed. If the overall intention is to be taken into account, then it is likely that the beneficiaries would be poor Copts, since they are the ones who would go to churches, monasteries or convents for charity (from where the endowment-giver states that money is to be distributed). As Fahim put it, with a touch of irony: "It's not very often that a poor non-Copt would go to a far-away monastery in the desert just to get charity."

One particular case which the Coptic Association for Awqaf will be sure to present at the joint committee meeting is that of St Mary's Deir Al-Sorian.

"A Father Maximus bought 57 feddans from the monastery's budget decades ago. The money from that land is allocated for housing, education, the expenses of the monks living in the monastery, then churches and finally, and if there is any surplus, it should be spent on the poor."

"The fact that non-church experts confirmed that the monastery is indebted to the tune of LE50,000 is ample proof that there is no surplus to be distributed to the poor, Christian or otherwise," explained Fahim.

Nevertheless the Egyptian Awqaf deemed that the general term "poor" in the donor's will meant that it should claim the endowment. This was not an isolated case, said Fahim. "Most of the endowments state that only surplus funds should be spent on the poor, and as most monasteries and convents are indebted, this is not applicable." Fahim also pointed to court cases in which the ruling had been in favour of the Coptic Awqaf, but the ruling had never been implemented.

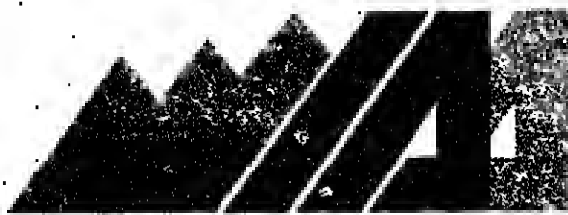
The Coptic Association for Awqaf would only be satisfied if the joint committee decided that all the confiscated land and the rent received for it by the Egyptian Association for Awqaf be repaid in full, he said.

This may seem ambitious, but Fahim is hopeful that some progress will be achieved. "The appointment of Zakzouk and his personal supervision of the new committee brings fresh hope and makes me optimistic about the resolution of this problem," he said.

Zakzouk was equally positive: "I don't want this issue hanging in the air. A solution must and will be found. If the committee does not reach a solution, we will solve the problem by other means. I must emphasise that we will reach a solution that will satisfy our Coptic brothers."

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On to the third economic summit

No sooner had President Mubarak given the go ahead for MENA III two weeks ago, than preparations began in earnest. Niveen Wahish reports

A confirmation last week by President Hosni Mubarak that the third Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit (MENA III) will take place as scheduled has triggered a flurry of activity both on the part of the government and the business sector. MENA III is scheduled to be held in Cairo from 12-14 November.

A series of ministerial and businessmen's meetings were held last week to discuss plans for the conference, and a detailed blueprint for the conference preparations was announced at last Thursday's cabinet meeting. The cabinet also reviewed proposals for 52 regional and Egyptian projects which Egypt will present to prospective investors during the conference. These project plans were presented for the cabinet's consideration by government and business organisations as well as the major banks.

The cabinet also reviewed the conference programme and authorised the publication of a number of documents detailing the status of various sectors of the Egyptian economy, including investment regulations, industry and the stock market.

In a related development, Minister of Foreign Affairs Amr Moussa last week met with members of the Federation of Egyptian Industries (FEI) and stressed the importance of a stable political climate for the success of the conference. He also expressed his hope that some progress in the peace process will have been realised by the time the summit takes place.

In the meantime, a committee representing businessmen's associations has been formed to help coordinate efforts to make the most of the conference. According to the committee's Deputy Chairman, Abdel-Moneim Soufy, the committee aims to maximise the private sector's role in the conference by pooling their resources, cooperating with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is responsible for organising the conference, and promoting the event abroad by inviting international associations to attend.

In addition, business representatives will prepare and present a number of project feasibility studies which could interest foreign investors attending the conference. The committee will also organise a number of

seminars and conferences prior to the summit to market the event.

Within the same context, the European Union's (EU) Private Sector Development Program (PSDP) last week launched preparations for a "match-making" event, which the EU will sponsor as part of conference activities. This event is designed to develop partnerships and promote co-operation between Egyptian and European businesses. The PSDP helps small and medium size Egyptian companies upgrade their performance to reach international levels.

Organised by the Egyptian-European Association for Economic and Social Development, an affiliate of the German-Arab Chamber of Commerce (GACC), the match-making event will capitalise on the presence of the huge number of international and regional companies during the conference to bring host companies together with visiting companies. Detailed company profiles and business proposals will be circulated among participants to enable companies to identify prospective business partners.

Addressing representatives from roughly 250 companies during an informative session on match-making, Peter Gopfrich, executive director of the GACC, last week invited Egyptian companies planning to take part in the MENA conference to present a profile of each company along with a proposal of the new business prospects it is searching for.

He said that the profile along with the proposal will then be placed in a catalogue which will be distributed to European companies and associations. This information will also be fed into a data bank on the Internet where it will be available to anyone who has the service.

Gopfrich called upon Egyptian companies to present this information as soon as possible so that European companies would have ample time to study the proposals closely before the conference. This would also allow European firms, who on the whole have expressed a keen interest in the Egyptian market, enough time to set up appointments with Egyptian companies, he added.

Recognising Egypt's importance in the region, especially within the framework of the European-Mediterranean partnership agreements, European companies are seeking to set up long-term relationships with their Egyptian counterparts in order to carve a share for themselves in the market, said Gopfrich.

Also commenting on the upcoming summit, Redallah Helmy, chairman of the Tenth of Ramadan Investors' Association, said that the business community should not be affected by the political atmosphere and should make the most of the conference. Business match-making, he stressed, is an economic activity, totally removed from political quarrels such as the ongoing dispute between Israel and Egypt over Israel's reluctance to move ahead with the peace process. Over the past few weeks, a war of words between Cairo and Tel Aviv has cast left a cloud over the MENA conference, which was dispelled only after President Mubarak announced that Egypt would move ahead with preparations for the conference.

Prerequisites for Arab integration

In the second part of his article on prospects for an Arab free trade area, **Taha Abdel-Alim** stresses that economic development on the local level is a prerequisite for economic integration

Post-Cold War international and regional developments such as the 1991 Gulf War and breakthroughs in the Middle East peace process render it necessary to discuss the different impediments in and dimensions of Arab economic integration.

This discussion becomes necessary given the disparities between Arab economies, the lack of integration between their industrial structures, and the disproportionate Arab contribution to the international economy.

On the regional level, Arab countries have witnessed several strides on the economic liberalisation front, acute political conflicts, and a tendency towards regional interdependence, specifically among Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) members. But while the concept of a so-called Middle East market gains momentum, inter-Arab economic schemes and projects are becoming increasingly limited in size and scope.

On the global level, the collapse of the Soviet Union has discredited centrally-planned, state-dominated integration, while illustrating the merits of integration through private investments in a free market. This, however, does not—as was demonstrated by the European experiment—exclude the state's central role in devising policies and providing incentives for economic integration.

In positing the principle of integration, we find that there are certain economic prerequisites that must be present for integration to take hold in developing countries. These prerequisites include accelerated industrialisation, diversified production, and a high level of competitiveness. These are the same prerequisites set by the multilateral free trade agreement—known as the GATT agreement—for the integration of countries into the international free trade system.

Within this framework, the current global trend to form regional trade blocs should encourage Arab economic integration. While the Western industrialised countries increasingly control the global economy, both Arab and other developing countries are hampered by technological backwardness and, consequently, face the threat of increasing marginalisation.

Even more serious is the decline and inadequate utilisation of Arab oil revenues, as a result of various political, economic and technological reasons. These oil revenues played a decisive role in boosting inter-Arab economic relations, and developing collective economic Arab institutions over the past two decades.

Given the differences between their economies, Arab countries may be divided into three groups: oil-rich countries, moderately developed countries with varied capabilities but hampered by crises, and poor, marginalised countries exporting agricultural goods and mineral resources. Such disparities do little to reinforce economic integration.

Organisations involved in collective Arab economic action must be encouraged, especially in view of the consequences of Middle East peace settlements. Arab integration should be the driving force behind all of the initiatives undertaken within the framework of the Middle East peace process, be they infrastructure projects, capital flows, or intra-regional trade. Moreover, these factors will be instrumental in averting the risk of Arab economies becoming marginalised while Israel plays the central role.

Achieving Arab integration is necessarily an uphill battle. International and regional developments are not conducive to economic progress in the Arab countries. Therefore, in this respect, Arab countries are confronted with a multitude of tasks, such as upgrading their technological potential and economic productivity. They must improve their standard of education, vocational training and scientific research, and develop cost-minimising and profit-maximising mechanisms. They must modernise project management and work systems, diversify resources and improve production through specialisation. Economic and technological security should be bolstered; priority should be accorded to investments for development, and to political action over armed conflict. Venues should be encouraged for establishing mutual interests as well as realising compatibility in regional and international relations.

The writer is deputy director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

Suez Cement goes global

The projected sale of the Suez Cement Company shares on the London Stock Exchange early next year is viewed as another concrete step toward attracting foreign investment, writes **Ghada Ragab**

are particularly useful for investors who would like to invest in emerging markets because they hedge against risk and problems of liquidity.

The market value of the GDR offer, which constitutes over 16.7 per cent of SCC's total shares, is estimated to be between \$90 million-\$120 million.

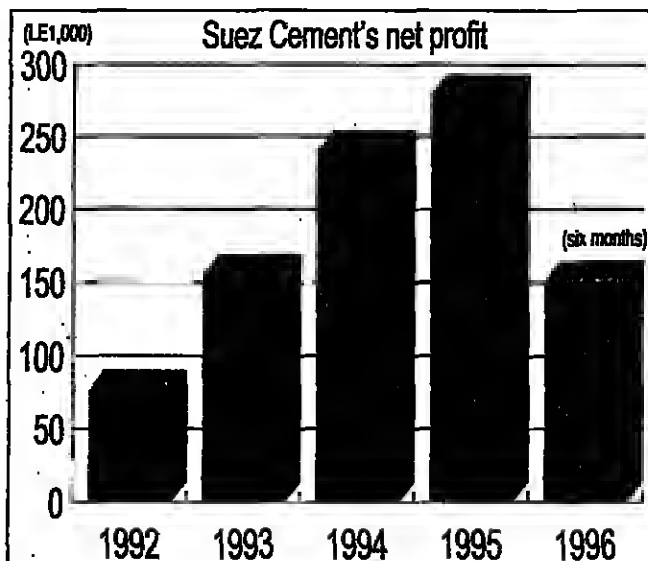
At a press conference on preparations for the offer, Charles McVeigh, chairman of

Solomon Brothers International, Ltd, the share offer's global coordinator, said the GDR price will be set by evaluating the share's domestic price and those comparable companies in other markets. In this respect, he said, Solomon Brothers is drawing on its experience in coordinating similar deals for cement companies in Portugal and the Philippines.

SCC, whose shares have skyrocketed in

the past few years—going from about LE4 in 1991 to over LE52 last week—has been one of the most active companies on the stock exchange in terms of the value of shares traded and the number of transactions.

The company was established in 1977 as a shareholding company under the provisions of Law 43 of 1974, later amended by Investment Law 230 of 1989. Its two



plants in Suez and Qatariya have a total capacity of about 2.9 million tons annually.

SCC posted net profits of LE151 million in the first half of 1996, compared to LE280 million in the whole of 1995.

The banks have appointed the Commercial International Investment Company (CIIC), a CIB affiliate, as the offer's local advisor. CIB Managing Director and CIIC Chairman Adel El-Labban said that using the GDR format attracts large institutional investors and shareholders with huge financial capabilities, thereby facilitating any future capital increases that the company might need. Diversifying the sources of demand on the stocks, added El-Labban, will improve the SCC's share price on both domestic and international markets. The offer will also put Egypt's name at the top of the list of investment opportunities in emerging markets.

NBE Chairman Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz said the success of bids to sell Egyptian stocks on international markets gives the Egyptian economy a clean bill of health, and will help attract much-needed foreign capital in the form of direct investments.

"Egypt needs foreign investments to be able to achieve the targeted rate of growth of 7-8 per cent in the coming four years," said Abdel-Aziz.

CMA reforms ease trading

A dramatic increase in the volume and value of shares traded on the Egyptian Capital Market over the past year has highlighted the inadequacy of, and danger inherent in, the current depository and trading system.

Given that the current system is based on physically holding the securities debentures, the risk of loss or damage in the course of trading is high, said Capital Market Authority (CMA) officials. Consequently, the CMA has laid down plans to implement a new central depository system (CDS).

The new system, hope CMA officials, will be instrumental in negating many of the drawbacks of the existing one. Under this system, for example, if an investor has a 100-share debenture, he cannot sell only 50, since the debenture cannot be split up easily. Another defect in the current system is that while in article 100 of the Capital Market Law 95, ownership of the debenture bond must be transferred to the new buyer as soon as the transaction is completed, the new owner is not able to sell his securities until a series of complicated and lengthy steps are completed. The new CDS will allow investors and brokers to cut through much of this red tape, thereby increasing the speed with which transactions are completed.

The implementation of the new system will be through the Misr Clearing and Settlement and Central Depository Company

A new capital market central depository system could help investors stay ahead of the game on the Egyptian market, while cutting through existing red tape, reports **Mona El-Fiqi**



The new system will facilitate transactions in the stock market

photo: Ayman Ibrahim

(MCSD), a private sector company, two major Egyptian banks and several bookkeeping companies. Moreover, brokerage companies will also have the right to carry out the activities of the MCSD. Brokerage houses, however, must open an account in one of the two banks.

Under the projected CDS, shareholders will no longer be required to physically retain the securities debentures. Instead, when the ownership status of the debentures is changed, the changes will be registered in accounts held by brokerage houses in bookkeeping companies. These

companies are also responsible for managing investors' securities accounts.

One of the main advantages of the CDS, say CMA officials, is that it will enable brokers to increase the flow of trading while reducing risk of loss.

Though not yet implemented, plans for

this new system have been in the pipeline for several months.

The International Federation of Capital Market Authorities has demanded implementation of this system for all its members as a condition for continued membership. Consequently, the Egyptian CMA, in cooperation with the French Capital Market Authority, began preparations for implementing the new system some months ago.

"As trading on the market increased over the past year, it became imperative that Egypt implement a system to help efficiently manage securities trading," said Abdel-Hamid Ibrahim, head of the CMA.

"With the creation of the CDS, investors can rest assured that their securities are being handled according to international standards, procedures and regulations," added Mohamed Abdel-Salam, deputy chairman of the MCSD.

CMA employees have been sent to France to study the new system in order to be able to hold training courses for employees of the brokerage and central depository companies.

By implementing the CDS, the CMA will have to embrace certain international capital market standards, thereby increasing its appeal with foreign investors. An important added incentive for foreign investors will be that their securities will be housed in either the National Bank of Egypt or Banque Misr.

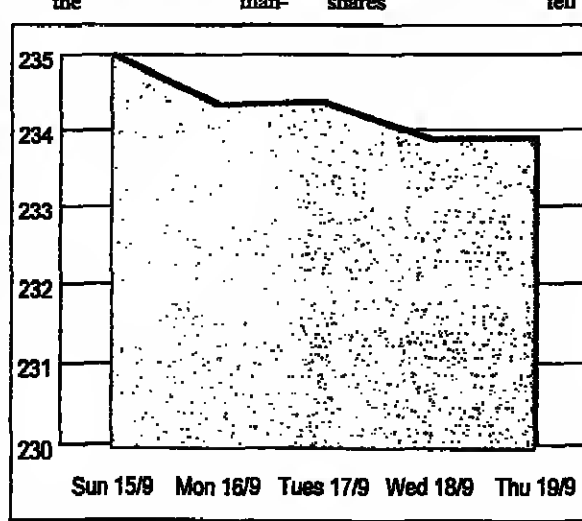
Market report

Winning in Memphis

THE CAPITAL Market Index lost 1.14 points for the week ending 19 September, closing at 233.91 points. During the week, LE267.16 million in shares changed hands compared to LE287 million the week before.

In the manufacturing sector, shares of the Memphis Pharmaceutical and Chemical Industries Company captured the spotlight, after the 40 per cent stake offered by the company was 230 times oversubscribed. Trading in the company's shares accounted for 18.7 per cent of total market activity and was valued at LE50 million. Trading in shares of the Arab Cotton Ginning Company (ACG), however, managed to top this figure. Trading about 1.4 million shares worth LE37.92 million, ACG transactions accounted for 28.88 per cent of total market dealings. The company's shares closed at LE27 after opening at LE5 per share. Shares of the Ameriya Pharmaceutical Industries Company (Rhône Polanc) gained LE30 to

close at LE425. Only four manufacturing sector companies registered a loss in share value this week, among which was the Alexandria Spinning and Weaving Company. The company's shares fell



recorded a 209 per cent increase in share value to close at LE3.4. Shares of the Delta Insurance Company, however, lost 10.33 per cent of their value to level off at LE23.

In all, shares of 45 companies increased in value, 11 decreased and 35 remained unchanged.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

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Hizbullah on the balancing beam

Fighting between Hizbullah and Israeli troops flared again this week. But can the Shi'a party, with only seven deputies in the new parliament, play a role in Lebanon's precarious political system beyond leading the resistance in the south. Amira Howeldy interviews the group's deputy secretary-general and talks to observers in Beirut

While the five-nation committee monitoring the April cease-fire agreement was meeting to look into Israeli and Lebanese complaints concerning the latest clashes in South Lebanon, the Islamic resistance movement Hizbullah and Israeli defence forces were engaged in heavy fighting. Last week, two Israeli soldiers and three Hizbullah guerrillas were killed in Israel's self-proclaimed security zone in South Lebanon, according to an Israeli army spokesman. Two Lebanese civilians were wounded and several homes damaged by Israeli shells. Although both sides signed the cease-fire agreement, effectively ending a 17-day Israeli blitz on Lebanon last April, Israel and Hizbullah had their own agendas. Observers agree that the committee's decisions will not stop Hizbullah from pursuing the liberation of the 15km-wide Israeli-occupied zone in southern Lebanon, and Israel will not desist from retaliating even if it violates the agreement.

Although Israel's raids on the Hizbullah stronghold Iqlim Al-Toufah caused the group significant material damage, it served the group's interests as it won additional sympathy, support and financial aid from outside sources. Hizbullah, in its struggle

for a strong political role in Lebanon, has repeatedly admitted in statements by its leaders that Israel's April onslaught radically increased the group's supporters as reflected in the elections. Nazih Mansour, one of the group's four candidates in the South Lebanon elections, won 159,244 votes—the highest score in the governorate. The remaining Hizbullah candidates in South Lebanon and Bekaa also won.

Hizbullah's loss of two seats in Mount Lebanon and Beirut triggered speculation about the group's real political weight in Lebanon. The group insists that the elections were rigged, but to those who are aware of the number of supporters it has, particularly in Shi'ite-dominated south Beirut, this allegation is questionable. A foreign diplomat who demanded anonymity told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "Maybe the group was not yet ready to enlarge its political representation beyond the Shi'ite-dominated areas."

Selim Nassar, a Lebanese writer and political analyst, voiced a widespread opinion. "It's true that Hizbullah's parliamentary ambitions were curbed, but this falls within the context of a new era, the curtailment of the extremist representation —

Christian and Muslim — in the parliament, while giving more power to moderates whose quiet position remains tolerable." This is seen clearly in the bold statements regarding Hizbullah made by Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri before and during the elections. "We do not have good relations with each other," he said in an interview. "They carry different political views from ours, they have different relationships with others... they view Lebanon differently from us. Therefore, in reality, there is nothing common between us except the occupation we are resisting."

These statements, said the foreign diplomat, reflect Lebanon's official stance on Hizbullah. "It should not be more than a resistance movement, there to strengthen Syria's negotiating position, and should not, therefore, have political ambitions." Syria, the main power-broker in Lebanon, was consulted during the formation of the electoral tickets and must have approved the attempts made to limit Hizbullah's representation in the parliament, he explained.

"Hariri, like many Arab leaders, has the illusion that peace with Israel is tomorrow," Talal Salzman, editor-in-chief of *Al-Safir* newspaper, told the *Weekly*. "The main hindrance is Hizbullah, because it keeps blocking peace attempts." Unfortunately for Hariri, suggested Salzman, such possibilities are obstructed even further by the fundamentalist policies of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Hizbullah's continued efforts to join decision-making in Lebanon could possibly bear fruit. Miehail Nafal, a researcher specialising in Hizbullah, argues that the group has modified its political approach and projects to comply with developments in the region. "At the beginning, when the religious tone was strong, Hizbullah called for the liberation of all of Palestine. Now, however, they have become more realistic in their vision and talk only about liberating south Lebanon," he said. Their 'pragmatic' policy, continued Nafal, was one of the

reasons they managed to force the region's key players into recognising them in the April cease-fire agreement and unprecedented hostage exchange. Hizbullah's 'Lebanization' attempts have further progressed in their promotion of a non-Israeli image.

Hizbullah's only challenge, says Nafal, will be proving its efficiency and political clout in the coming parliamentary term which could see an Israeli withdrawal from the south or a peace treaty with Syria. "Hizbullah will then have to be prepared for the possibility that both Syria and Lebanon will not be willing to let it make further political gains," he said.

But Hizbullah says it is prepared. It claims to have repaired 5,000 Lebanese homes, rebuilt roads and paid compensation to 2,300 farmers. A spokesman from the group told the *Weekly* that Hizbullah built a hospital in south Beirut and reconstructed various schools, "representing a challenge to the government, which has not bothered to acknowledge the thousands of poor families in need of schools and decent medical care."

Here to stay

Nasem Qassem, 43, is deputy secretary-general of Hizbullah and one of its founders. Before joining the group, Qassem worked as a chemistry teacher but resigned after he was recruited by the resistance movement in South Lebanon. In an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly* in South Lebanon, Qassem accused Lebanese premier Rafiq Al-Hariri of launching a media campaign against Hizbullah to win American confidence. He admitted that Hizbullah's seven elected MPs will have a difficult time operating given Hariri's parliamentary bloc. As for resistance on the ground, Qassem pointed out that Hizbullah "will not put on hold any of its military operations" despite the April cease-fire agreement.

The pattern of Hizbullah military action has undergone many fluctuations. There are periods of relative calm such as that which preceded the April cease-fire agreement and continued through the general elections, and then there are spurges of activity. What is the logic behind such pattern?

Military resistance comprises action in the field. When an observer notices an increase in such operations it is due to the existence of suitable circumstances in the field. There is no relation whatsoever between our operations and the April agreement or even the elections, because the *mujahideen* (holy warriors) who perform their duty in combating Israel are recruited for that purpose only. Many people said that after the 'April agreement', it was all over for us, but we conducted a series of operations 10 days after the agreement, a clear signal that we intend to pursue our usual method of resistance. Our active resistance has nothing to do with any agreement or political reality and the coming days will tell.

The four-year term of the new parliament might coincide with an Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon or a Syrian-Israeli agreement. How is this likely to affect Hizbullah?

Netanyahu in power means four lean years. This is a blessing for the Arabs and Muslims in that they will be forced to reconsider their strategy towards their enemy. Hypothetically, should Syria sign a peace agreement with Israel, then everything is likely to change. The only thing I can say is that

Hizbullah, as an ideological and political force, is deeply rooted in Lebanon and the region. No matter what happens it is not going to disappear.

In dealing with new developments we prefer not to reveal the details of our strategy. We started studying the possibility of peace with Israel two years ago, but wisdom dictates keeping the enemy in the dark.

Is it the possibility of peace with Israel that has led Hizbullah's attempts to promote its image as a political party and not only as a military movement?

Behind Hizbullah entering the political arena, and parliament in particular, lies our Islamic perspective on the nature of jihad and political work. The concept of *ijtihad* in the Ja'fari sect allows us to undertake Islamic activity within Lebanon's confessional system, as Lebanon is now a predominantly Muslim country.

How do you explain Hariri's war of words against Hizbullah during the elections?

I refuse to take such criticism personally. When Hariri talked about 'moderates' facing 'extremists', he was repeating the slogans by which American and Israeli officials refer to our Islamic resistance. Hariri tried to make use of those statements to assure the Americans and the Israelis that he is capable of confronting the Islamic trend. But he was unsuccessful because the Islamic trend in Lebanon is the only one that is really struggling to liberate the land, the only one making a contribution to restoring peace in Lebanon. Hizbullah believes in dialogue with other parties and I think that Hizbullah's political experience is a pioneering one in the Arab world. Hariri's slogans cannot change this reality.

But Hizbullah is certain to encounter difficulties in dealing with the parliamentary bloc of premier El-Hariri, whose economic and reconstruction projects they strongly oppose.

Of course the task of our MPs will be difficult, not least because they are a minority in a polarised, pro-government parliament. But we have to act as the voice of the people and promote our beliefs. We cannot allow the country to become hostage to any individual's policy, particularly

when that policy will undermine the economic and political situation of Lebanon.

Some say that Hizbullah wanted to create an enemy out of Hariri to win sympathy in the south and Bekaa and to guarantee some seats in parliament, especially after losing votes in the second and third rounds?

Our problem with premier Hariri did not start only after we lost the two seats in Beirut and North Lebanon. Political confrontation had peaked before these losses. Additionally, Hariri was trying to destroy all the opposition, not only Hizbullah. Thus the issue was not one of finding an enemy in order to win public support. God knows that Hizbullah's popularity has grown significantly following the latest Israeli aggression in April. There was and is no need for us to fabricate problems in order to win support.

Your last minute coalition with the Amal movement suggests that, problems with Hariri apart, you have other difficulties with some of your supposedly natural allies. The coalition was justified as a means to prevent clashes between the two groups. Is this likely to happen?

The recent build-up of Israeli troops, combined with repeated war threats by Israel, was the main factor behind the formation of this coalition, since it made it imperative to stabilise the internal situation. Syria was also keen to see us unite so as to close any possibility of Israeli interfering in Lebanon's internal affairs. Added to this was the prime minister's attempts to strike at the Islamic movement. Given these considerations we thought that the coalition would be the best means of averting the possibility of any American-Israeli interference. We did this knowing that the coalition did not satisfy our ambitions, beliefs or the aims of the Islamic popular trend. The coalition was a

necessity rather than the result of any bargaining of interests.

But this coalition was interpreted as a sign of weakness on the part of Hizbullah, a sign that your movement was unable to stand alone, without the support of Amal.

We did not need the coalition to get into parliament. We had already joined forces with leftist groups, intellectuals and a number of strong southern families which made our chances of winning the majority of Shi'ite seats very strong. I have already outlined the reasons behind the coalition. These reasons do not imply that Hizbullah itself needed an alliance. Others, rather, needed the coalition.

Blocs are already being formed in the new parliament. What is Hizbullah's position vis-à-vis these blocs?

I doubt whether election coalitions will turn neatly into parliamentary blocs, though it is a possibility that Hizbullah will act as a bloc with its allies in the parliament. But I do not think that the new parliament will differ greatly from the previous one, unless, that is, new alliances are forged in response to specific issues.

Why did Hizbullah's leaders refrain from running in the elections?

you say about this?

We are a resistance movement operating in the political arena of Lebanon. Our ultimate goal is the liberation of territories occupied by Israel. Both Syria and Iran share the same goals and have been willing to support us morally and financially. Our cooperation with these two countries has intensified in line with their growing support of our cause. If this kind of support was shown by other countries, our relationship with those countries would be strong as our relationship with Syria and Iran. Outlining our strategic relationship with Iran and Syria is their agreement on matters that are important to us. This is a common and legitimate practice of all political movements, all over the world.

What is your comment on the view that Syria is trying to curb Shi'ite Hizbullah's political role while giving more support to Sunni Hariri?

Syria makes its own calculations vis-à-vis the political situation, in co-ordination with some of the parties in Lebanon. We will not interfere with those calculations. What remains important to us as a group in the political arena is building relationships with others and co-operating with them. This is what happened with Syria. Damascus does not interfere in matters that are of no concern to Syria, and we do not interfere in matters that are not our concern.

Beyond promises

In Amman this week, Dina Ezzat attended an NGO forum with an eye on a better future for Arab women

"Life is so hard. What can I tell you? I would not know where to start," said Umm Salem, a Palestinian refugee who lives in Al-Hussein camp, a few kilometres west of Amman.

A resident of the camp since the Israeli invasion of Palestine in 1948, Umm Salem grew up, got married, and became a mother and a grandmother in this camp. She lived there during the days when all the refugees had were a few tents stretched from the branches of trees and mud covered the ground. Now she has seen those tents turned into modern buildings.

Over the years hardships continued to unfold: days without food or clean water, a lack of basic sanitary services, no medical care, and the constant feeling of being on the run. "We still have nightmares. They are different but they are still nightmares," she sighed.

Today, Umm Salem's nightmares are gaining new dimensions. "They say it is the time of peace. OK, we like peace, but how can this be peace when life is getting more difficult? Everything is unbelievably expensive. Before I could manage the day's food supply with one lira [a Jordanian dinar which is now the equivalent of \$1.45]. Today, three or four dinars wouldn't even cover one meal a day," she complained.

The financial problems of Umm Salem's household were recently multiplied by the unexpected arrival of her 32-year-old daughter Fatima and her five children. "Fatima fled the house of her Jordanian husband who was beating her up and literally pulling out her hair for over three years," Umm Salem said.

The bitter reality of tens of thousands of Palestinian women and their families who live in about 11 refugee camps in Jordan (only seven are officially recognised) are basically the outcome of their displacement.

The problems of poverty, violence and human rights violations are shared by millions of Arab women day in and day out. "It is true that the lives of Palestinian women, be they in the so-called National Authority territories or in the diaspora, are particularly complicated because they are denied the right to a homeland that is theirs and are persecuted by a ferocious enemy. But our other Arab sisters are also suffering from similar problems," said Laila Abu Dekta, a Palestinian social worker.

"In essence, Arab women share problems of the same nature. It is only the scale and impact of

these problems that varies from one country to the other," stated the resume of a plan of action for the improvement of women's conditions in the Arab world which was approved by an Arab non-governmental organisations (NGOs) forum held this week in Amman.

Indeed, it is not just women living under the Israeli occupation in Palestine and South Lebanon that suffer unduly, conference participants agreed. In Iraq and Libya, the Western-imposed economic embargoes are forcing women to live without basic services and watch their children starve to death. In Algeria, women are caught in the cross-fire of the militarised political conflict between the state and the Islamist political opposition. In Sudan, the Islamist ruling regime is slowly but surely dragging women backwards. In Egypt, women are forced to abandon their hard-won rights so as to avoid further antagonising the Islamist militants. In Kuwait women are still fighting to locate their male relatives taken hostage during the Iraq-Kuwait War. And in many of the oil-rich Gulf states, women cannot break loose from the tight knot of ultra-conservatism.

In addition, despite numerous international conventions on gender rights ratified by Arab nations, women all over the Arab world are still far from being on equal footing with their male counterparts, over-worked, under-paid and continuously threatened by political and military conflicts, according to the forum.

The 400 NGO representatives from 13 — out of the 22 Arab states who met in Amman debated all these problems and their possible answers in the document of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995. Participants then formulated a plan of action that was later reviewed by the Arab ministers of social affairs in the Jordanian capital.

By the year 2000, the over-all conditions of 115.5 million Arab women should benefit one way or the other from this plan of action. The Amman Declaration underlined the need to grant women a larger share of the national development plans in the Arab world.

Participants in the NGOs forum seemed to agree on the need to further engage women in the political decision making of their countries as a basic tool to pave the way for the improvement of women's conditions. Without women's participation, the feminisation of poverty and il-



Palestinians gather in front of the Dome of the Rock upon hearing that Israel just opened a new tunnel whose entrance is on the Via Dolorosa in the Moslem Quarter and which leads underground to the Walling Wall in the Jewish quarter of the Old City (photo: Reuters)

literacy and reproductive and human rights violations will continue to be a common feature in the lives of Arab women.

Several Arab countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women with many reservations. Discriminating against the right of a mother to pass on her nationality to her children by a not-native father is a common dominator among all the CEDAW ratifying Arab states with the exception of Tunisia. This discrimination is supported by the Arab League which prohibits that any Arab citizen should have a dual Arab nationality.

"But it is not just the reservations that we are talking about. Even the articles that are ratified are violated on daily basis," criticised Amal Abdel-Hadi, member of the Cairo Centre for Human Rights Studies. Without women's voices and sufficient reactions from decision-makers, Abdel-Hadi added, the ratifications of pro-women documents will remain ineffective.

In other words, if kept out of the decision-making process of their countries, women will always be treated as second-class citizens.

But at the end of the forum some participants were skeptical that the outcome of the forum will help improve the lot of half of the Arab world's

population.

"Women need to move on beyond the rhetoric," said Samiha Khalil. A long time political activist, Khalil — who contested Yasser Arafat for presidency of the Palestinian Legislative Council in January — did not sound very optimistic about the implementation prospects of the plan of action approved by the forum. She said, "If we [the Arab world] lack political independence and if we lack democracy, and if \$670 billion of the Arab savings are in Western banks and if the largest parts of our budgets goes to military spending, how will we solve the problems of poverty, illiteracy and violence against women?"

A clean break with peace

A shocking study reveals efforts to transpose the Reagan Cold War model on Israel and the Middle East, writes **James Zogby**

A disturbing yet significant document has recently come to my attention. Titled "A Clean Break", it was prepared by what is described as "A Study Group on a New Israeli Strategy Toward 2000" and was published earlier this year by the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies. That institute is based in Jerusalem, but has also opened an office in Washington DC.

"A Clean Break" is a strategy paper that outlines a series of policy recommendations for the new Israeli government. The paper even suggested specific language which Prime Minister Netanyahu should incorporate into his speeches during his July visit to the United States.

What makes the document significant is the fact that many of the recommendations proposed and even the specific language suggested appear to have been adopted by Netanyahu. The themes and policy proposals found in "A Clean Break" were echoed by the prime minister repeatedly during his many public addresses in the US capital.

What makes this strategy paper disturbing, however, is the fact that the study group leader responsible for preparing "A Clean Break" is Richard Perle, a former assistant secretary of defense in the Reagan administration. Perle is currently serving as a key figure in Republican presidential nominee Bob Dole's foreign policy brain trust. The remainder of the study group includes other Reagan era officials, who have also been identified as Dole advisers.

In their dual capacities as advisers to the Republican nominee and strategists for the Likud prime minister, the study group is calling for an end to the peace process and the beginning of a Reagan-style Cold War campaign in the Middle East that would establish Israeli hegemony, destabilise the Arab world and, in effect, institute a new order based on peace by conquest.

In the opening part of their document, the Perle group discusses how the Labour-led peace process undermined Israel and led to a "strategic paralysis".

It says, "While there are those who will counsel continuity, Israel has the opportunity to make a clean break, it can forge a peace process and strategy based on an entirely new intellectual foundation, one that restores strategic initiative and provides the nation room to engage every possible energy on rebuilding Zionism."

The first recommendation made in the report is for the new prime minister to re-define peace and emphasise Israeli security as essential to peace. This section of the report reads: "Early adoption of a bold, new perspective on peace and security is imperative for the new prime minister. While the previous government, and many abroad, may emphasise 'land for peace' — which placed Israel in the position of cultural, economic, political, diplomatic, and military retreat — the new government can promote Western values and traditions. Such an approach, which will be well-received in the United States, includes 'peace for peace', 'peace through strength' and self-reliance; the balance of power."

"Israel's quest for peace emerges from, and does not replace, the pursuit of its ideals... Israel can now embrace negotiations, but as means, not ends, to pursue those ideals and demonstrate national steadfastness. It can challenge police states, enforce compliance of agreements, and insist on minimal standards of accountability."

For Netanyahu's Washington speech, the Perle group proposes the following language: "We have for four years pursued peace based on a new Middle East. We in Israel cannot play innocents abroad, in a world that is not innocent. Peace depends on the character and behaviour of our foes. We live in a dangerous neighbourhood, with fragile states and bitter rivalries. Displaying moral ambivalence between the effort to build a Jewish state and the desire to annihilate it by trading 'land for peace' will not secure 'peace now'. Our claim to the land — to which we have hung for 2000 years — is legitimate and noble. It is not within our own power, no matter how much we concede, to make peace unilaterally. Only the unconditional acceptance by Arabs of our rights, especially in their territorial dimension, 'peace for peace' is a solid basis for the future."

Once again, replaying the Reagan Cold War model of direct confrontation, the Perle group suggests that "instead of engaging Syria in negotiations, Syria should be challenged, isolated, and destabilised. Toward that end, the report notes:

"Syria challenges Israel on Lebanese soil. An effective approach and one with which Americans can sympathise, would be if Israel seized the strategic initiative along its northern borders by engaging Hizbullah, Syria and Iran... as the principal agents of aggression in Lebanon, instigating Syria's drug-money and counterfeiting infrastructure in Lebanon... paralleling Syria's behaviour by establishing the precedent that Syrian territory is not immune to attacks emanating from Lebanon by Israeli proxy forces and striking Syrian military targets in Lebanon, and should that prove insufficient, striking select targets in Syria proper."

"Israel can also take this opportunity to remind the world of the nature of the Syrian regime... Given the nature of the regime in Damascus, it is both natural and moral that Israel abandons the slogan comprehensive peace and move to contain Syria, drawing attention to its weapons of mass destruction programme, and rejecting 'land for peace' deals on the Golan Heights."

As the US during the Reagan era was overcome with the euphoria of developing costly strategies designed to contain and disrupt the "evil empire", and the building of alliances to project hegemony, the Perle group proposes that:

"Israel can shape its strategic environment in cooperation with Turkey and Jordan, by weakening, containing, and even rolling back Syria. This effort can focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq — an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right, as a means of foiling Syria's regional ambitions."

To accomplish these goals, the Perle group proposes grand schemes to enmesh Turkey and Jordan in a regional power struggle that would "redraw the map of the Middle East" in a way that would "threaten

Syria's territorial integrity."

To ensure Jordan, the Perle group proposes that Netanyahu "visit Jordan as the first official state visit, even before a visit to the United States... support King Hussein by providing him with some tangible security measures to protect his regime against Syrian subversion and encourage — through influence in the US business community — investment in Jordan to structurally shift Jordan's economy away from dependence on Iraq."

Additionally, they propose to "divert Syria's attention by using Lebanese opposition elements to destabilise Syrian control of Lebanon" and engaging tribal alliances through Turkey and Jordan that could further destabilise the Syrian state itself.

In one of its wilder moments, the Perle group suggests that "King Hussein may have ideas for Israel bringing its Lebanon problem under control. The predominantly Shi'a population of southern Lebanon has been tied for centuries to the Shi'a leadership in Najaf, Iraq, rather than Iran. Were the Hashemites to control Iraq, they could use their influence over Najaf to help Israel wean the south Lebanese away from Hizbullah, Iran and Syria. Shi'a retain strong ties to the Hashemites; they venerate foremost the Prophet's family, the direct descendant of which — and in whose veins the blood of the Prophet flows — is King Hussein."

This section of the report begins with the recommendation that "Israel has a chance to forge a new relationship between itself and the Palestinians."

To encourage this, the Perle group insists that Israel reserve for itself the right of "hot pursuit," that is, the right to enter Palestinian-controlled areas. They also propose that Israel insist on "full Palestinian compliance," stating that "Israel has no obligation under the Oslo Agreements if the PLO does not fulfil its obligations" by closing down all of its operations in Jerusalem and bending to other well-known Israeli demands.

Since the report writers do not feel that the PLO can perform as they demand, a replacement ought to be found for the PLO. "To prepare for this," the report states, "Israel may want to cultivate an alternative to Arafat's base of power. Jordan has ideas on this."

And if this were not shocking enough, this section of the report includes the recommendation of a new Israeli practice: the discrediting of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) by insisting that it "be held to the same minimal standards of accountability as other recipients of US foreign aid. A firm peace cannot tolerate repression and injustice. A regime that cannot fulfil the most rudimentary obligations to its own people cannot be counted upon to fulfil its obligations to its neighbours."

In other words, Israel is not to be held accountable for human rights violations, but the PNA, which has been forced by the US and Israel to "crack down", is to be condemned. Like anti-Soviet human rights crusaders of the Reagan era, their concern is obviously not the protection of human rights, but the discrediting and ultimately replacing of the PNA.

It is within this area that the efforts of the Perle group to transpose the Reagan Cold War model on Israel and the Middle East is most clearly on display.

To "manage and constrain" US reaction to their plan to transform the peace process, the Perle group recommends that Prime Minister Netanyahu "formulate policies and stress themes he favours in language familiar to the Americans by tapping into themes of American administrations during the Cold War which apply well to Israel."

Instead of operating like the Labour government, which the writers accuse of inviting US intervention into Israeli affairs in order to "overcome domestic opposition to 'land for peace'", they propose that the new Israeli government "make a clean break from the past and establish a new vision for the US — Israeli partnership based on self-reliance, maturity and mutualism — not one focused narrowly on territorial disputes. Israel's new strategy — based on a shared philosophy of peace through strength — reflects continuity with Western values by stressing that Israel is self-reliant, does not need US troops... and can manage its own affairs."

Finally, the report proposes that Netanyahu seek US-Israeli cooperation in developing a "missile defense system" which they suggest would not only protect Israel but would also "broaden Israel's base of support among many in the United States Congress who may know little about Israel, but care very much about missile defense."

It is clear that the peace process is in deep trouble today. In fact, it is correct to note that the process was in a downward spiral even before the new Israeli elections. But if the writers of "A Clean Break" are in fact influential in shaping Israeli and US policy, then the election of a Likud government presents grave new damage not only to the peace process but to the peace and well-being of the entire Arab world.

It is clear, so far, that at least some of the rhetoric and strategic thinking of this group has been adopted by the Netanyahu government. For this group of Reagan-era, Dole-Netanyahu advisers to be ultimately successful, their US candidate must not only win but must personally adopt their strategic thinking as well. It is clear that at least as a candidate, Bob Dole has been heavily influenced by the themes of the Perle group. In his platform and his recent addresses, Dole spoke of "working more closely and smoothly with a Netanyahu government than a second term Clinton administration", "not pre-empting Israel's sovereign right to devise its own national security policy", supporting "Netanyahu's call for 'peace through strength', and 'not pushing Israel to give up the Golan Heights'."

The question, of course, is would a President Dole follow the same line as candidate Dole; and would the group that appears to be influential in proposing language for his speeches and those of Prime Minister Netanyahu be brought into a Dole administration in positions where they would be able to shape a coalescing of US and Israeli policies into the launching of a bitter and destabilising Middle East cold war.

The writer is president of the Arab American Institute.



Kurds of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan at the Iran-Iraq border on their way back into Iraq (photo AFP)

Keeping Iraq boxed

Despite a relaxation in tensions between Washington and Baghdad, US reinforcements in the Gulf appear set to remain until the US elections, writes **Hoda Tawfik** from Washington

For the time being at least, US President Bill Clinton believes that things are proceeding reasonably well in Iraq. "I feel good about it," he stressed.

It is not clear if this is a tactical approach aimed at keeping the scene calm for a few more weeks before the November elections. The US seems to be conducting a war of nerves against Iraq. With the deployment of 3,500 US troops in the Kuwaiti desert near the Iraqi border now complete, the question begging for an answer is how long will American forces remain in the Persian Gulf area, given that their stay will be difficult to justify.

Clinton's tone was conciliatory as he voiced his satisfaction regarding Iraq's behaviour on the eve of his address to the 51st UN General Assembly. This comes at a time when many UN officials and delegates are wondering exactly how alienated the US administration is from the organisation.

The US policy towards Iraq has not changed. The strategy remains the same in spite of the acknowledgment by CIA Director John Deutch that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's influence has been strengthened in the region after he regained control over northern Iraq.

The US still hopes to find a way to reconcile the two Kurdish warring factions in northern Iraq. This is not a crucial American strategy, however, as the north of Iraq was over of vital interest to America. This ex-

plains why the US strategy concerning Iraq remains essentially the same. Other considerations are more important from the US point of view. First, sustaining a strong US military presence in the area, the linchpin of which is "Operation Southern Watch", now extended a few kilometres from the heart of Baghdad. Second, maintaining UN sanctions to prevent Saddam Hussein from rebuilding his army or becoming a regional financial power. Third, putting pressure on UN arms monitors to trace and destroy what is left of Baghdad's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles. Fourth, encouraging the Iraqi opposition. Fifth, keeping Iraq weak so that it cannot interfere and obstruct America's vital oil interests in the region. However, "the containment policy is directed against the rich and powerful Iraqi state and not only Saddam," said Naimir Ali Jawdat, a Middle East consultant living in the US.

The only substantive variation in the American strategy towards Iraq is less emphasis on Operation Provide Comfort (OPC) in northern Iraq as the fate of future arrangements, including the Turkish plan to establish a security zone along the Iraqi side of its southeastern border, lies in the hands of Ankara.

US officials insist that the US role in northern Iraq is far from over and they will try to re-assess some influence there in the coming months. But one key component, the

air cover for the Kurds provided by OPC, could disappear after December if Turkey refuses to extend the mandate of the operation. This would affect the US ability to fly allied war planes over northern Iraq.

Some Kurds in Washington say that the fate of the Kurds does not count as much as Clinton's re-election campaign odds. The Kurds are yesterday's strategy, they say, now that the US has failed to keep the Iraqi army out of the north of the country and reconcile the Kurdish factions, especially since the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) allied itself with Saddam Hussein.

In the words of CIA director John Deutch, the US accuses KDP leader Massoud Barzani of playing an enormously dangerous game. Commenting on Barzani's encounter with US Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs Robert Pelletreau in Ankara last week, he said: "Mr Barzani is now approaching the anti-Iraq coalition for protection, in an effort to keep Saddam Hussein at arms' length. Meanwhile Saddam is putting increasing pressure on Barzani to negotiate for autonomy under Baghdad's overall control."

The pressing question for the Clinton administration is whether Baghdad intends to issue another challenge before the November elections. Rather than risk being caught by surprise, the US reinforcements may stay until election day "to be on the safe side," said a Pentagon official.

Kurds lose Comfort

Iraqi Kurds say that Operation Provide Comfort no longer exists because most aid workers have left in fear of another strike by Saddam Hussein. **Omayma Abdel Latif** reports from Zakho in Iraqi Kurdistan

The two-storey building in Zuzaq Al-Nassari Street in Zakho in northern Iraq stands like a ghost house. Until two weeks ago, the building known as Military Coordination Council (MCC) was the headquarters of Operation Provide Comfort (OPC) in northern Iraq. It is no longer is.

"The Americans have gone without even telling anybody about their departure time," said Abdel Aziz Ragab, head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) office in Iraqi Kurdistan. "They have left behind all their machine guns and even all their personal belongings and have taken with them all their soldiers," Ragab told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Under OPC, some 2,000 personnel, primarily from Turkey, the US, Britain and France were to provide protection to Iraqi Kurds in northern Iraq by using Turkish bases to fly more than 30 daily sorties north of the 36th parallel to deter Iraqi attacks against the Kurds. The military operation began in the wake of the Gulf War to allow Iraqi Kurds to return safely to their homes in northern Iraq and to protect them from further persecution.

Ironically, the OPC staff were the first to flee Iraqi Kurdistan and were stationed in Solobi, a Kurdish village in Turkey which is 20km from the borders. According to locals and the UN staff operating in Zakho, nobody knows exactly what was the reason for the staff of OPC to flee to Turkey. One UN worker in Zakho said, however, that during the past two weeks there have been rumours that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was coming back with his troops. "The Americans and the British were told to leave as soon as possible so they thought it would be better to evacuate all their people. Most relief agencies have gone now," said Stig Erikson, a Danish official working in the United Nations Guard Contingent in Iraq (UNGCI).

To many Iraqi Kurds, OPC, since day one, had only one meaning: protecting the no fly zone. Since the flow of humanitarian support has ceased to come to the area a long time ago, and while fighting was going on between the two Kurdish factions, the OPC staff were watching the latest developments on CNN.

Many Kurds who spoke to the *Weekly* are sceptical about American protection if Saddam comes back. "How can they protect us when they were the first to run away, even before Saddam was thinking of returning?" said Akram Mohammed Youssef of the Turkmen Party in Zakho. The deteriorating conditions in the area have led the sheikhs of Zakho mosques to urge the Kurdish people not to lose patience. "The Kurds should depend on themselves. We have been let down by everybody, but you Kurds should remain patient and Allah will reward you," said one sheikh in his Friday sermon.

But the patience of the locals is running thin since everyday life activities have literally stopped. Many shops have closed for lack of supplies and even on a busy Friday afternoon, only five out of 15 shops are open in Zakho's main street but with very little to sell. Iraqi Kurds, says Akram, are stocking up the goods available in case Saddam strikes again. "There is nothing to buy. There is no food, no medicine. We thought the war was over but here another war will begin and this time over food," Akram said.

There are now only two aid agencies, besides UNGCI, still operating in northern Iraq: an American organisation called Shelter Now with a one-member staff and the Islamic Relief Organisation. Other NGOs and a French medical organisation called North-West Medical, which have been operating since the Gulf crisis, left northern Iraq at the beginning of this month. In the past two weeks, it was reported that aid agencies in northern Iraq were facing difficulties in crossing the borders with their aid staff.

On September 10, a letter was directed to the head of Ibrahim Khalil customs post from Thomas Kivlan, the team leader of a UN aid group requesting assistance in facilitating the passage of his staff and vehicles carrying food through the borders.

"Our people spent two and a half long, frustrating hours to get the vehicles into Zakho. We urge you to facilitate with all the assistance needed," Kivlan wrote in his letter.

Now the UNGCI, which has been stationed in Zakho since 1991, provides the bulk of aid, name-

ly medical assistance and food, to the northern Iraqis. Kivlan explained, "Our mandate is to support all humanitarian aid but our job also includes protecting the locals and NGOs from any possible attacks. We negotiated with Baghdad that all the humanitarian aid which comes through the Turkish borders should be escorted by UN guards. We do not fear any attacks from the Iraqi troops because we are legal and work under a UN umbrella." But another UN worker, who declined to reveal his name, said that the situation was still critical in the area. "There is a serious atmosphere. People are scared because the staff of MCC has left all of a sudden. It can only be for one reason, the Iraqi troops are coming from the south," he said.

Another reason which adds to the growing fears of the inhabitants in Zakho is that Turkey has been massing troops along its borders with Iraq in preparation for implementing its security zone plan. This security zone will include Zakho, as it lies only 5km from the border.

"We thought that the war was over between [Patriotic Union of Kurdistan leader Jalal] Talabani and [KDP leader Massoud] Barzani and that all the troubles would be over. But now everybody waits in nervous silence for the troops to come from the south or the Turks to turn the area into a battlefield against the fighters of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)," said a Kurd.

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Post-Papandreou PASOK

GREECE'S governing PASOK (Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement) won an absolute majority in last weekend's elections, taking 162 seats in the 300-member parliament. The conservative opposition New Democracy party garnered 108 seats in the single-chamber parliament, down from 110 in the previous session.

The Communist Party of Greece lagged behind in third place with 11 deputies, two more than in the last parliament. Greece's ethnic Turkish minority, which is mainly Muslim, has regained a voice in parliament after three years in the wilderness with three of its representatives gaining seats. The 100,000-strong Muslim minority, based in northeast Greece, won not a single seat in the 1993 elections.

Parliamentarians demand right to food

THE RIGHT to food is the most basic human right and must be ensured before political rights are possible, the president of an international organisation of lawmakers said at the opening of this year's Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) conference in Beijing.

A Chinese draft proposal on human rights was adopted by the IPU as the basis for a resolution. The draft was accepted after it won "overwhelming majority votes" over those of 20 other countries at the annual conference of the world's largest parliamentary organisation.

The draft said the current "international economic order is still unjust, which hinders the realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms." The document also called on governments to "strengthen international cooperation, to promote mutual understanding through dialogue, and to the promotion of protection of human rights on the basis of equality and mutual respect."

More than 1,400 parliamentarians, speakers and representatives from 130 countries are attending the conference in Beijing.

The IPU was created in 1889 on the initiative of two parliamentarians from Britain and France to promote personal contacts between members of all parliaments to strengthen representative institutions and promote world peace and cooperation.

Paris meeting fights organised crime

LAST WEEK, magistrates, police officers and researchers from 80 countries gathered in Paris for a conference on organised crime, which was opened by French Interior Minister Jean-Louis Debré.

In his opening speech, Debré told delegates that organised crime was "a major concern because it threatens the balance of our democracies." The conference is the 18th such gathering to be organised by the criminological research body known as the Intercentric Messina. Founded in 1978, the organisation is attached to the Messina University in Sicily and had become a consultative body for the United Nations.

The course will last one week and its speakers will include reputed anti-crime figures such as Colombia's Luis Enrique Montenegro Rincón, the deputy director of the Bogota police force responsible for the fall of the drug boss Pablo Escobar, and Italy's anti-Mafia judge Bruno Sicari.

Organised crime represents a \$500 billion market each year "at least," said the head of the international police organisation Interpol at the start of a week-long pow-wow of police from five continents. American, German, British and French police will discuss the issues with colleagues from nations like China, Thailand and Chad.

Red Cross denies Nazi links

THE INTERNATIONAL Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) vigorously denied allegations that some of its officials worked for the Nazis during World War II.

The World Jewish Congress charged last week on the basis of US intelligence documents that ICRC workers had been involved in the trafficking of Nazi war spoils and had spied for the Germans. The reports, dated from the end of World War II, labelled certain activities as spying that were "perfectly normal, carried out openly and with the accord or at the request of the Allied authorities," the ICRC said in a statement.

The ICRC, noting that it was an independent organisation founded in Geneva in 1863 to take care of those wounded and taken prisoner during armed conflicts, said that throughout the war it furnished the names of prisoners and their relatives to their home governments.

The organisation's central files contained nearly 36 million names of prisoners of war of all nationalities, the statement said.

UNCTAD warns of deflation

DEFATION poses a risk to the globalisation and growth of the world economy, still stagnating after one of the deepest recessions in the post-war era, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) said last week.

"With ever more integrated financial markets, the risk of deflation is real if monetary policy in developed countries continues to focus solely on combating inflation while governments are mainly concerned with cutting the budget," the organisation said in its annual report.

UNCTAD forecast that world economic growth this year will not exceed 1995's rate of 2.4 per cent, compared with 2.8 per cent in 1994, despite the continued buoyancy of world trade, up eight per cent on last year.



Pity the poor

The UN pleads for the world's poor and puzzles over the US's next move, writes Gamal Nkrumah

It is wrong to assume that reforming the United Nations would be a matter of little moment to Africa. External factors have sometimes helped improve Africa's economic performance. Africa's economic trends are slightly better than they were in the 1980s. Still, the continent cannot afford to ignore the much-touted United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF).

Africa is home to a third of the world's poor. How can the UN help the poor if it is in the throes of its worst financial crisis? "The job ahead of us is monumental. Not only do we have the task of raising the incomes of the 1.3 billion people living on less than \$1 a day, we also face the daunting task of creating greater equity, opportunity and empowerment," noted James Gustave Speth, the UN Development Programme administrator. "Each day another 67,000 people join the ranks of the poor. That's about 25 million people each year." But the poor will not feature at the top of the agenda of the state and government gathered at the UN headquarters in New York for the 51st UN General Assembly this week.

So what is the UN-NADAF? Grandiose schemes, imaginative proposals and solemn promises to eradicate world poverty are not always enough to solve the problem. "The UN-NADAF is a new departure in international development cooperation. I am strongly committed to it. It must be made to yield results," stated UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali back in 1992. But as I pored over the UN-NADAF's mid-term review, I wondered how it would be made to yield results. The United States forced the UN to reduce its 1996-97 budget by \$250 million to \$2.61 billion. The UN was obliged to do away with some 1,000 jobs, or 10 per cent of its workforce, at its New York headquarters and to set a strict hiring freeze. Ironically, the US is the UN's largest debtor.

Africa, too, is in dire straits. The net flow of official development assistance to the continent declined from \$25 billion in 1992 to \$23 billion in 1994. "Africa's gross domestic product grew by 2.3 per cent in 1995 but its population grew by 2.9 per cent resulting in an actual per capita income decline of 0.6 per cent," warned the UN-NADAF's mid-term review. "Its share of world trade fell from 3.1 per cent in 1990 to 2.1 per cent in 1995, while foreign direct investment has declined significantly." Economic growth and social development in Africa depend on continental economic integration, higher export growth rates and foreign capital inflows.

According to the UN-NADAF's mid-term report, "Africa's debt has risen from \$289 billion in 1991 to over \$314 billion in 1995." Moreover, the report pointed out that even though world trade as a whole is projected to rise by some \$210 billion annually in the next few years, studies estimate that "Africa stands to lose up to \$3 billion a year due to the Uruguay Round of world trade talks, mainly from hikes in import duties, budget deficits and the costs of lost preferences with the European Union."

Why should the UN-NADAF succeed when other similar projects have failed? The deputy director of the UN Information Centre in Cairo and the UN co-ordinator for media activities for the Gulf region, Hedayat Abdel-Nabi, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the UN-NADAF was reviewed on 16 September 1996 and she assured that "the views of African governments, non-government organisations, multilateral institutions and regional bodies such as the Organisation of African Unity are taken into account."

Abdel-Nabi explained how in November 1995, Boutros Ghali embarked on a determined effort to reform

and streamline the UN to make the international organisation more cohesive and effective in eradicating poverty and promoting world peace. "He launched an efficiency effort to accelerate change in the management of the UN Secretariat," Abdel-Nabi said. "The volume of documentation and publications printed in the UN Secretariat has been cut by 13 per cent since January 1996. Multiple projects in UN offices around the world have been streamlining administrative processes and expanding the use of information technology. A new, easier-to-use UN Home Page is now on the Internet, which in a couple of months will make over 270,000 UN documents in all six official UN languages available electronically in 157 countries."

In Africa, nearly 170 million people do not get enough to eat. About 23 million African children are malnourished and 16 per cent of babies are underweight. An American official abducted to Mogadishu was freed last week after his kidnappers realised that they had mistaken him for an official of the UN World Food Programme (WFP). The kidnapped official, Daniel Suher, was actually an official of the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Clearly a case of mistaken identity. So why did Somali militiamen want to kidnap a WFP official? The Somali wanted the UN agency to pay some \$270,000 that they claimed was owed to its Somali employees. The Nairobi-based Somali Aid Coordination Body warned that kidnapping is hampering humanitarian relief work.

How is the UN going to meet the needs of the world's poor if the world body is scaling down its operations because of drastic cuts in its budget? The UN is owed a total of \$2.8 billion by member states — over half of which is owed by the UN's largest con-

tributor, the US. America's share of the UN budget stands at 25 per cent today. Washington wants it down to 20 per cent. The US owes the UN about \$1.7 billion and its reluctance to pay its dues directly affects the UN's agenda for alleviating world poverty.

"We have begun a series of reforms," Ghali told the British newspaper *The Independent* last week. "I want to be re-elected to be able to continue with the reform." But the US opposes his re-election. A couple of days ago, US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns made it abundantly clear that Washington still strongly disapproves of Ghali. "The US is not inclined to step back from its position. We're not inclined to consider any kind of option that would allow for the continuation in office of the secretary-general. We firmly believe that the best solution is to select a new individual to occupy this office," Burns said.

What allegedly irritates the Americans most is not Ghali's obstruction of reforms but his supposed lack of managerial skills to inspire his staff and of political ability to convince the English-speaking world that the UN is worth saving. Poppycock. The US ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright, spearheads the smear campaign against Ghali. "The UN desperately needs an administrator at the helm," she told reporters last week in what many observers see as part of US presidential electioneering games in the run-up to 5 November. The same observers feel that America is buying time to put off paying its dues. On condition of anonymity, a Western diplomat told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the US intends to delay repaying its debts to the UN until the end of the year when Ghali's future will be decided. Meanwhile, on the sidelines, Africa watches the slanging match. Better a short season of comedy at the UN than a long-running farce if the world body was scrapped altogether.

Thoroughly fatal neoliberalism

Revolutionary guerrilla groups are making a serious comeback in Latin America, as economic liberalisation forces more and more people below the poverty line, writes Faiza Rady

All across Central America, various revolutionary guerrilla groups have taken up arms in defiance of their governments' structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). In Peru, the long-dormant Shining Path guerrillas recently made a comeback, strengthening their base in the impoverished Lima slums and hitting army bases in the distant hinterlands. Two weeks ago in Colombia, 500 fighters of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) destroyed the army's anti-narcotics base at Las Delicias near the Peruvian border, killing 61 soldiers and capturing 67 more. Over the following week, the guerrillas attacked 28 other government installations and brought road and railway traffic to a halt.

The attack was launched in solidarity with the *campesino* (peasant) movement in the south. As part of its "war on drugs" campaign, the Colombian government has ordered the military to destroy all coca fields — without considering that the production of coca remains the only means of subsistence for impoverished southern *campesinos*. As a result of the government's economic deregulation policies and after the elimination of protective tariffs on agrarian production in 1988, the price of coffee — the country's major cash crop — decreased by 40 per cent. Forced out of coffee production and unable to find a viable alternative, Colombian peasants turned to the cultivation of coca.

"When income decreases to this extent and children are starving, one shouldn't wonder why poor peasants choose to turn towards the lucrative market provided by the North American narcotics traffic," wrote political analyst Noam Chomsky. Commenting on the recent attack against the military, a FARC member explained: "This is a military campaign in solidarity with the *campesino* movement. The fact that these *campesinos* grow coca doesn't mean anything. The army is killing these peasants. They want to take away the only means of subsistence that they have."

In Mexico, a new rebel group — the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) — surfaced this summer. "The EPR is a blossoming of 30 years of activity by dozens of urban and rural leftist groups. This movement traces its origins back to the student uprisings of 1968, which were fuelled by the cost of staging the

Olympic games that year. A dirty war by the authorities then led to a wave of disappearances, forcing the leftists underground," explained Britain's *The Independent*.

On 28 June at Aguas Blancas, an impoverished village bordering the beach-resort and posh international tourist resort of Acapulco, EPR fighters fired 17 shots into the air at a memorial service commemorating last year's massacre of 17 peasants in an army ambush. Denouncing the government's neo-liberal policies that are destroying local markets, the group called for the overthrow of President Ernesto Zedillo's administration.

The government was quick to retaliate against the EPR's challenge. After the guerrillas made their first appearance, army raids on peasant activists have been reported in the states of Puebla, Oaxaca, Veracruz and Hidalgo. "Peasant leaders said that the military clearly feared the EPR movement, based in the state of Guerrero, could have a domino effect in the largely neglected poverty-stricken southern states," reported *The Independent*.

In Guerrero, where farmers still live in mud shacks without water or electricity, while the rich and super-rich vacation in neighbouring Acapulco's ritzy clubs and casinos, human rights groups reported that *campesino* activist Jose Nava Andrade had been kidnapped and tortured by neo-identifying themselves as police. Andrade said he was blindfolded and strung up on a tree before receiving electric shocks to his testicles from a portable high-tech appliance. Throughout the torture sessions, Andrade was asked to divulge the identity of the EPR guerrillas. In Puebla, intelligence agents were on the lookout for 16 liberation theology priests known for their active support of revolutionary peasant movements.

Initially dismissed by Zedillo as "pantomime revolutionaries", the guerrillas soon showed their mettle. Two weeks ago, they coordinated attacks to six states killing at least 17 policemen and marines. The group clearly made their point. "Among [the guerrillas'] targets," reported *Newsweek*, "was the Pacific coast resort of Huatulco, where the largest Club Med in the Western hemisphere is rising within sight of

wretched mud-floor shanty towns," underlining the social disparity.

Commenting on the EPR's emergence, Senator Heriberto Castillo said that the EPR had appeared "as a result of social marginalisation, poverty and political repression. The people do not want to take up arms. They are forced to." Echoing the senator's words, the FARC member explained: "The misery, poverty, lack of social alternatives and worsening of all manner of conflict has forced people to take up arms. They have no other alternative. We are fighting truly *fatal* neoliberalism." Across the continent "each struggle has its own history," wrote *Newsweek*, "but the fighters all vilify the same enemy: the new face of Latin American capitalism."

This so-called "new face", however, dates back almost two decades. Since SAPs were implemented in Latin America in the early 1980s, the number of people living below the poverty line has increased from 130 million to 180 million. According to Enrique Iglesias, president of the Inter-American Development Bank, implementation of such programmes has caused the loss of most social and economic gains realised over the '60s and '70s. Also, class inequalities have been aggravated continentwide, with a twentyfold income differential between the richest and the poorest 20 per cent. Since the early 1980s Latin American governments have transferred more than \$280 billion in net interest payments to Northern banks. Following United States directives, with the intention of making personal windfall profits, Latin American countries' elites have auctioned off public enterprises at discount rates, exposed local economies to multinational exploitation and removed the last barriers impeding Northern appropriation of capital and natural resources.

Mexico's path towards economic neo-liberalism illustrates the Latin American experience. While the government controlled some 1,500 public enterprises in 1982, it currently retains only about 100 companies. As a result of the wholesale dumping of the public sector, 10 major financial monopolies have emerged, controlling 71 per cent of the stock market's shares. "By selling the nation's patrimony to a band of

wealthy families, the government has created a dangerous rupture of the social fabric," wrote Jaime Aviles, editor-in-chief of the Mexican daily *La Jornada*. This is because 10 per cent of the population control 70 per cent of the national revenue, while 90 per cent share the rest. Among the 37 million employable people, 21.5 million are either unemployed or underemployed and half of the workforce make less than the minimum wage. "The extraordinary wealth of the privileged elite could make one forget the abject poverty which is the lot of the majority," commented Chomsky.

The corruption of the political elite partially explains the situation. When former President Miguel de la Madrid started dumping the public sector, he sold profitable companies to many of his political friends and allies. A case in point was the sale of the national copper industry, which De la Madrid wrote off as "no longer strategic". The Minera Mexico industrial group, which acquired the sector for pennies, is currently considered the most successful copper producer worldwide, with profit margins of four million pesos (\$334,000) a year and assets of 18 million pesos.

Other friends of the former president also made quick and easy money. "Last year *Forbes* magazine published the names of 15 Mexican millionaires, all beneficiaries of such fraudulent privatisation schemes," wrote Aviles. And the profits of these national enterprises are not re-invested in the national economy: by the end of last year, the amount of Mexican capital deposited in US banks had reached \$24.6 billion — exactly double the amount deposited by the end of 1994. Yet despite the political elite's ideological and economic investment in privatisation, the latest projected wholesale auctioning of the country's main industry — the petrochemical sector — was even rejected by many representatives of the ruling Institutionalised Revolutionary Party (PRI). When the PRI gathered to vote on the issue last Saturday, a majority of delegates rose to their feet, clenching their fists in the cries of "Mexico, Mexico" and voted against privatising the state-owned company. In this particular case, the guerrillas' message may have made the difference.

Bosnia: the politics of stalemate

Careening helplessly from ethnic war to botched elections, Bosnia remains stuck in the role of a battleground for big powers in search of a new, post-Cold War equilibrium in Europe. At the very least, the powers were spurred into action by the overthrow of Yalta — the conference that decided the post-World War II dispensation.

The elections' complete and final validated results are not out yet, and many authoritative voices are crying foul. But the United States, the sole remaining superpower, has scored another point by following up the Dayton agreement with the most America-friendly outcome possible under the circumstances. "Stalemates can help a place like Bosnia," *The New York Times* headlined on the front page of its Sunday "Week in Review" section. The piece could at the latest have been written on Saturday 14 September, while the 4,000 or so polling stations were still open across the war-ravaged, patchwork country.

But for the paper many consider closest to US officialdom, the outcome was pre-ordained: a stalemate, "a hopeful sign" for Bosnia, because "stalemates are sometimes policies in themselves," and "even uneasy stalemates buy time for people to resume normal lives and look for more permanent solutions."

The stalemate in Bosnia will also buy time for the US to re-engineer NATO according to its own superpower imperatives, extend its eastern reaches to the frontiers of a dependent Russia, quell European moves for any kind of independent defence and diplomacy, and bring in the Arab-Muslim world on Eurasia's southern flank as a junior partner.

There is no room in this scenario for United Nations multilateralism. Indeed, the UN was conveniently discredited and discarded, along with the European and Canadian blue helmets, after the Srebrenica debacle. The US stepped in and picked up

Washington silenced the Serbs' guns, but the real prize is refashioning NATO in its own image, writes **Jooneed Khan**

the pieces at Dayton, with a NATO core called IFOR, the US-led Implementation Force built around 20,000 GIs and loosely including Russians and East Europeans deployed on the ground.

The guns were silenced, thanks to US leadership. Elections were then entrusted to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), but this was put under US control, with Robert Frowick calling the shots and Sir Kenneth Scott of the United Kingdom second in charge.

European monitors of the Helsinki and International Crisis Groups raised alarm after alarm that free and fair elections were not feasible at such short notice and under local management. They argued that no one knew for sure how many of the 3,522,306 voters of Bosnia-Herzegovina listed in the 1991 census had been killed or had died during the war and how many had fled or moved. And they claimed that proper rolls needed more time and resources to prepare, that voter security and campaigning freedom were inadequate and that risks of manipulating the outcome were too great.

With the Mostar fiasco — which revealed cracks in the Muslim-Croat alliance — fresh on everybody's mind, Frowick headed their advice and postponed the municipal elections, scheduled for 14 September as well, to late November. This week, the OSCE agreed to amend the controversial rules which allowed the self-proclaimed Republika Srpska, bent on consolidating the "ethnic purification" of territories it won in the war, to force thousands of Serb refugees to register in strategic or symbolic municipalities where they will never reside.

But the "federal" and "national" elections of 14

September have clearly legitimised "ethnic purification" by rewarding the nationalist war parties in each camp, particularly the chauvinistic Serb Democratic Party (SDS) and Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), which now stand triumphant against the backdrop of the Dayton map of a de facto partitioned Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Eager to pre-empt any attempt at frustrating US wishes, the OSCE jumped the gun and proclaimed Alija Izetbegovic winner of the tripartite presidency and his Muslim Party of Democratic Action (SDA) dominant in the "national" parliament. A flood of complaints from local parties and foreign observers forced the OSCE's election expert, John Reid, to concede "errors of addition and transcription, and problems of duplicated results." He added, "Nobody has won as long as the results are not certified."

Anecdotal, the foul-up is being blamed on a team of US-supplied information technology specialists working the computers — a reminder of the IBM mix-up at the Atlanta Summer Olympics. The OSCE also admitted that it did not know the size of the potential electorate or the percentage of voter participation. Reid said the final results could vary by as much as 50,000 votes and ordered a recount.

But the harm is done. According to published OSCE "preliminary definitive results," barely 25,000 votes separate Izetbegovic from Momcilo Krajcinovic, the Serb who finished second in the presidential triumph. The HDZ accused the OSCE of "violating electoral law" after its presidential candidate, Kresimir Zubak, saw his total reduced from 342,025 to 329,891 votes. The Republika Srpska announced it would oppose any questioning of the

"fairness" of the vote, at least within its own territory.

"What the OSCE has done is irresponsible," said Hrair Belian of the International Crisis Group. "Computer errors at this stage are unbelievable. The international community has lost all credibility. The political parties can now question the whole electoral process."

This messy stalemate may be the best option for US strategy and the local political elites, but it also breaks the momentum of the Dayton process. The much-hoped-for rapid implementation of new institutions, followed by early efforts at reconstruction, are now out of the question.

Disagreement between Americans and Europeans has broken out over the venue for the first meeting of the tripartite presidency; the US favours Sarajevo, the Europeans want it to be the UN, while Krajcinovic has suggested a "neutral suburb" of the Bosnian capital.

There is disagreement also on the lifting of UN sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (formerly Serbia and Montenegro), set under Resolution 1,022 for "the 10th day following the first free and fair elections" in Bosnia. Russia, and the Europeans, want it done quickly, with Yugoslavia readmitted to the UN General Assembly, while the US wants a free hand to re-impose sanctions as it deems fit.

All this on the eve of a crucial NATO defence ministers' meeting this week in Norway, where the agenda is dominated by Russia's sudden refusal to see the Atlantic alliance extend its military structure to its very borders and by Germany's demand for a heightened role for Europe within a renovated NATO — a demand which was traditionally voiced by France and which goes counter to the US world view.

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Padania and other lies

Can the "green shirt" militia succeed in dividing Italy into north and south, asks **Abul-Maaty El-Sandouby** in Rome

The first punch directed at Padania, the new republic proclaimed by secessionist Umberto Bossi this week in Italy's wealthy northern region, came from its supposed citizens. Rightist leader Gianfranco Fini organised a counter-protest to denounce the proclamation of a new nation in northern Italy, persuading some 100,000 northerners to wave Italian flags and solemnly sing the Italian national anthem.

No more than 30,000 supporters of Bossi's Northern League sported the regional party's green shirts and turned up for the farcical declaration of Padania's independence last Sunday. The Northern League failed to rally support for its cause. In fact, the secessionist party's propaganda depended on a hiccup that only northerners pay taxes in Italy.

Populist Bossi urged his fellow northerners to kick southerners out of their public sector jobs, to boycott taxes and create northern-only unions.

Northern League demonstrators booed a woman who displayed her belief in Italian unity by hanging the Italian flag from her window. She, in turn, swore at them and showered them with insults. She also made a rude gesture at the secessionists which infuriated the crowd.

Bossi, surrounded by a Padanian "provisional government", read a solemn declaration of secession for the region before a few thousand supporters. Sunday's rally in Venice — picked as the capital of Padania — was to be the culmination of a three-day independence festival and Bossi had predicted "millions" would turn out there for the "most important rally in Italian history."

Many Italians — both northerners and southerners — dismissed the calls for an independent Padania as little more than a stunt, but politicians nonetheless kept a wary eye on the show which has left many feeling uneasy.

Polls in northern Italy suggest that only two per cent of the population support Bossi's calls for secession for the state of Padania, which includes eight of the country's wealthiest regions: Lombardy, Piedmont, Liguria, Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna and Veneto.

Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi warned: "Unity and autonomy must travel together in our country." Prodi criticised the Northern League's green-shirted security force which he insinuated was an ugly reminder for Italians of the Fascist black-shirted thugs. Prodi pointed out that Bossi is under investigation by several prosecutors for allegedly attacking the Italian constitution.

Bosnia's 'royal mess'

Allegations of election fraud have put the results of last week's Bosnian ballot in doubt and placed the Dayton peace process in jeopardy

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which ran last week's Bosnian elections, continued to investigate the results of the controversial poll this week, after finding irregularities which could invalidate the outcome of the ballot and delay the implementation of vital stipulations of the Dayton peace accords. Among these stipulations is the repatriation of refugees to their pre-war homes, reports **Yassin Aljam**.

The OSCE announced last week that the elections had been won by the leading nationalist parties of the three ethnic communities. The organisation is now to run vote-counting checks, after problems with the count were found in both the Muslim-Croat Federation and the Serb-run areas of Bosnia. This delays the scheduled certification of the elections beyond the provisional 25 September deadline. Errors were found in the transcription and addition of results, and evidence was reported of ballot-box stuffing at polling stations and double-entry of results by counting centres. The International Crisis Group (ICG) monitoring the elections announced on Friday that turnout figures given by the OSCE planners had exceeded 100 per cent, raising the possibility of large-scale fraud. An ICG spokesman described the situation as a "royal mess".

"These discoveries have marred the initial optimism expressed by international monitors on account of the peaceful conduct of voters on the election day of 14 September. Last week Robert Frowick of the OSCE praised the 'fairness' of the elections, in spite of Serb and Muslim protests to the contrary."

The OSCE has yet to clarify whether the discrepancies uncovered last week might invalidate the preliminary announcement of victory for Bosnian

President Alija Izetbegovic, who only narrowly defeated the Serb separatist Momcilo Krajcinovic in the key race for the chairmanship of the three-member collective presidency. Such uncertainty constitutes a significant setback for the pressing issue of the repatriation of refugees, whose fate depends not only on the outcome of the elections, but also on a smooth transition to the next stage of the peace process, in which the joint institutions of post-war Bosnia are established.

In a statement to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, a spokesman for the Geneva-based office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) explained: "Local authorities seek repatriation as an unequivocal sign of a return to normalcy. In the meantime, the return of refugees is a sine qua non for the rehabilitation and reconstruction process starting."

It seems the ongoing refugee crisis in Bosnia will prove the litmus test of the durability of the Dayton accords. The issue is a constant reminder that the problems left over from the three-and-a-half-year civil war cannot be solved overnight. Election organisers disclosed last week that only 8,500 Muslim and Croat refugees crossed former frontlines on 14 September to vote in districts where they had lived before the war but which now lie in Serb-held territory. The ICG reported that most Muslim and Croat refugees who had wished to vote in Serb-controlled territory did not do so, as polling stations were deliberately placed well away from their old neighbourhoods, in areas where refugees feared for their safety. International organisers had expected over 130,000 people to cross the new ethnic boundary, hoping that this would start the slow process of the return of refugees to areas which were "ethnically cleansed" during the war.

According to the UNHCR spokesman, the problems faced by the refugees during the elections were symptomatic of obstacles to repatriation that have shown little sign of being removed since the signing of the Dayton agreement. "What the UNHCR has experienced in the course of this year is the refusal of the majorities to accept the minorities in their respective zones," he said. "This means the Dayton principle of 'return home' has been constantly challenged by the politics on the ground, with only a few efforts made by the international community. The results are very discouraging."

Nine months after Dayton, nearly one million refugees remain displaced within Bosnia, while a similar number currently seek asylum abroad. According to the UNHCR spokesman, his organisation faces two main obstacles to repatriation. The main stumbling block is the persistence of ethnic hostilities on the ground. In both the self-proclaimed Serb Republic, or Republika Srpska, and the Muslim-Croat Federation there is "very little exchange or communication between the populations and the authorities... This is provoking great problems as far as the principle of 'return home' is concerned," he said.

As a result, repatriation of refugees in Bosnia has, by and large, only been effective in areas where their ethnic group constitutes the majority. This will result in more long-term "protection problems" when refugees are eventually obliged to return to such areas as minorities.

The second stumbling block to repatriation is the absorption capacity of a country which, for different reasons, has not started its reconstruction process. Many refugees cannot go home because they simply have no homes to return to. Much of the aid donated

by international organisations comes in the form of assistance programmes, which include construction of temporary shelters and the distribution to returnees of basic building materials and household goods.

Compounding these difficulties facing returning refugees is a growing impatience among asylum countries. Germany, at present sheltering 320,000 Bosnian refugees, decided last week to lift its "temporary protection scheme" in a bid to force repatriation by 1 October.

It remains to be seen how this latest setback will affect the continuing refugee crisis in Bosnia, which the Dayton "juggernaut" has done little to assuage. As long as the outcome of the elections remains uncertain, so does action dependent on this outcome. The consensus among OSCE officials seems to be that the refugee problem can only be fully addressed after common institutions are up and running and municipal elections have been held. Until questions of local power have been sorted out, refugees will hesitate to return to areas dominated by other ethnic groups.

But the uncertainty which now clouds the results of the presidential elections may well put the holding of municipal elections, scheduled for November, in doubt. The municipal elections have already been postponed once — from August — after the discovery of abuses of voter registration. Moreover, there are fears that problems at this point only foreshadow later ones which could hamper both the launching and the running of the newly elected parliament and presidency — including moves towards secession by the victorious Croat and Serb nationalist parties. The refugee crisis is in danger of remaining open-ended.

Who are the Arab Americans?

Subtle developments in the US's political dispensation has placed new pressures on the three million Arab Americans, writes **Mohamed Wahbi** from Washington

Divided? Yes. But they are seriously trying to put their act together. Effective? Not particularly. But they have been learning, and learning fast over the last decade, how to play the game after living in the political wilderness for many decades, often caught between their countries of origin and their adopted homeland.

I am speaking about the three million Arab Americans whose existence we often forget but conveniently remember when we in the Arab world face a crisis like the one confronting us now as a result of the renewed conflict between Iraq and the United States. Who are these Arab Americans and what role are they playing in American politics?

They are perhaps among the most diverse groups of immigrants in the US. They came from most, if not all, Arab countries, but mainly from Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Yemen and Jordan. There are Christians and Muslims among them. Some emigrated as far back as 100 years ago, others after World War II. They emigrated for economic or political reasons. Many of them are comparatively recent arrivals in the US. James Zogby, director of the Arab-American Institute in Washington, says that until relatively recently Arab Americans were not even a community. The first wave of Arab immigrants, who came to America before World War I, were largely peasants and uneducated. They came for purely economic reasons. They did rather well for themselves. But because they came from rural areas, they did not bring with them the features of an urbanised population. Their identity was that of their original village, their family, or the church — the vast majority were Christians. From the 1920s until after World War II, the door of immigration was firmly shut, which helped the first wave of Arab immigrants, their children and grandchildren to assimilate fully.

It was only after World War II and the upheavals witnessed in the Arab world, especially the 1967 war, that several new waves of Arab immigrants arrived. These were mainly urban, educated people who were politically conscious of being Arabs. It was the convergence of the two groups — those who came before World War II and became fully American and those who came later with a strong consciousness of their cultural and political Arab identity — which led to the birth of the Arab-American community as we know it.

A strong and purely Arab identity became the driving force. The best example of this is the organisation of Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG), whose members often talked of themselves as Arabs in exile or Arabs abroad. This helped in rallying the Arabs, now coming in bigger waves from different Arab countries, around Arab causes such as Palestine. But the resolutions that the AAUG passed reflected inter-Arab differences. The controversy raging in the Arab world after Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's visit to Israel was, for instance, strongly reflected in these resolutions.

The descendants of the first wave of Arab immigrants, who were eager to rediscover their cultural Arab identity by joining the AAUG, found that the American dimension of which they were conscious was totally absent in the group. They wanted to express themselves as Americans, too. They wanted the positions taken by the AAUG to reflect American interests, which in their view could best be served by the US adopting a fair and balanced attitude towards the problems of the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular.

They also found that the way Arab issues were framed in the AAUG's resolutions kept them outside mainstream American politics. In reaction, they tried to emphasise not what kind of solution should be found for the Arab-Israeli conflict, but how to get Americans to recognise the human rights of the Palestinians and to accept the PLO as their representative. Hence, they established in 1977 the Palestine Human Rights Campaign as an American

organisation, to make the Palestinian problem an American issue. It was during that stage that two very prominent African-American leaders, Jesse Jackson, who later twice sought the American presidency, and Andrew Young, the then US ambassador to the United Nations, became involved in the Palestinian problem. Jackson attended the 1979 conference of the Palestine Human Rights Campaign and then went off to meet PLO leader Yasser Arafat in Beirut and Sadat in Cairo. Both Jackson and Young paid a temporary, but heavy, price for being ahead of their time. Young had to resign from his post for meeting the PLO's UN representative and Jackson was maligned for a long time for having embraced Arafat.

Another major landmark in the formation of the Arab community came in 1980 when Senator James Abourezk and James Zogby founded the Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC). The ADC succeeded in fusing the different strands of Arab Americans into a single community sharing common interests and objectives. By 1984 Jackson had asked Zogby to become the deputy campaign manager of his first presidential bid as a Democratic Party candidate. It was in the Jackson campaign that the Arab Americans first had a national political presence as a community. Later in the same year, George Salem, another descendant of the first wave of Arab immigrants, was invited by President Ronald Reagan's campaign managers to head the first National Arab-American Committee for the Republican Party's presidential campaign.

At the end of 1984, Zogby and Salem decided to join hands and start a project to get Arab Americans into politics. This led to the establishment of the Arab-American Institute. The institute's main aim was to develop the Arab-American community into a political constituency; in other words, to change it from a group organised within itself into a group organised for itself.

After 12 years of work the results speak for themselves. In 1984 Arab Americans were proud to have had four delegates to the national Democratic Party convention, but lacked representation in the Republican Party convention. This year their combined total in the two conventions was more than 100 delegates and party leaders. In the Democratic convention there were 60 Arab delegates and party leaders, including six trustees who raised more than \$100,000 for the party.

There are now literature and buttons proclaiming "Arab Americans for Clinton and Gore" paid for by President Bill Clinton's presidential campaign. Ten years ago, when Arab Americans raised funds for Democrat Walter Mondale's presidential campaign, the money was rejected out of fear of Jewish protest.

In the recent Republican and Democratic conventions, the Arab-American constituency lobbied on behalf of the Palestinians, the Syrians and the Lebanese. In each of the conventions, the Arab Americans staged an event which was attended by over 1,000 people with many delegates from other ethnic groups, party leaders and the leaders of the local

Arab-American community. It is worth noting here that events organised by other ethnic groups, whether Italians, Polish, Irish, Ukrainians or Greeks, drew only between 300 to 500 people, that is less than half the number of guests in the Arab-American events.

James Zogby has been elected as co-chairman of the National Democratic Coalition of ethnic leaders. Contrast this with what happened in 1978, when he was invited by President Jimmy Carter's White House to an ethnic leaders' meeting with Vice-President Mondale only to have his invitation withdrawn three days later because of "connections with the Palestinians". Over the last three weeks, Arab Americans have been to the White House several times to discuss the economic siege imposed on the Palestinians and the deteriorating situation in Iraq.

Arab Americans have come from outside the political arena to fight on the inside for the issues important to them. But they have certainly not won the battle, because they still have a long way to go to get more of their community involved in the political process, to unify its ranks and coordinate work among the three major Arab-American organisations: the ADC, now headed by Dr Hala Salam, the Arab-American Institute and the National Association of Arab Americans, which has become active as an Arab lobby in the Congress and as a regular forum for discussion of Arab-American issues since Khalil Jahshan became its director.

The writer is a columnist and chief of the Washington bureau of *Dar Al-Hilal* publishing house.



Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

On Saturday evening of 30 April 1901, Bichara Tagla, owner and editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram* received the strangest telegram in his career. The Baron Alfred Menache, one of the most prominent Jewish financiers in Alexandria, challenged Tagla to a duel and asked him to choose his witnesses.

To our knowledge, this is the first time that such an incident had taken place in Egypt. It is all the more curious because, at the turn of the century, this European custom was barely more than a memory of the past. The duel had its origins in medieval France. It was associated with particular rituals, the most notable of which was to throw one's glove in the face of one's adversary. Once the challenge was thus declared, each side would choose witnesses who would act as intermediaries in determining certain ground rules for the duel and the process of selecting the weapons. In the Middle Ages this was normally the sword or the spear, but with the discovery of gunpowder and the invention of firearms, guns were added to the arsenal of options.

Although the duel had largely died out by the beginning of the 20th century, it still occurred in isolated instances. In *Al-Ahram's* foreign news column, an article entitled, "Duels in the German Army" said, "In a report by the German Minister of War it was mentioned that only four duels had occurred among the officers of the German army over the past year, none of which had fatal consequences. This indicates that the measures taken by the army leaders to curtail this phenomenon have had very positive results."

This report appeared in *Al-Ahram's* edition of 28 January 1901, three months before Baron de Menache decided to introduce into Egypt a custom that was breathing its last in Europe. The newspaper relates that Tagla did not respond to the telegram, which was tantamount to the proverbial gauntlet. Then, "at 8.30 on Sunday evening, our director received a letter from Turnizoo Pasha and Ambrose Sinadino asking to meet with him. Tagla responded that he would await them at 10 o'clock. When they arrived, they told him that the Baron had challenged him to a duel because he considered Tagla's remarks an insult to his honour."

These "remarks" had appeared in *Al-Ahram* several days earlier, on Friday, 19 April. Bichara Tagla had written that he had an account at the Souares Brothers and that he had a verbal agreement with the bank not to transfer any amount from this account to their Alexandrian branch without his express approval. On Tuesday, 9 April, Tagla was in Alexandria and he went to the Souares' Alexandrian branch in order to withdraw some money. "He asked to see the *Khawaga* Rolo, and when he was told that Rolo was not in, he entered the office of the manager, Monsieur Nahman, in order to conduct his business. While in the office, Alfred Souares came in and spoke to Tagla about the allegations in *Le Pyramide*."

Al-Ahram and its French language edition

Le Pyramide had recently been waging a campaign against the brokers at the Alexandrian stock exchange. Through their speculations, *Al-Ahram* had written, "they want to swallow up six million feddans of land." This was a blow below the belt to the speculators at the stock exchange, and particularly to the large Jewish financing houses of Souares and Menache.

One imagines, therefore, that Tagla's reception in the Souares office was rather cool and that Souares' reference to *Le Pyramide* carried a certain menace. Equally cool, Tagla responded, "Pyramide defends the righteous and assails malefactors. If it points its finger at evil doers, the innocent should not have cause to feel insulted." At this juncture, the Baron de Menache entered. Upon seeing Tagla, he glowered and said, "How dare you come into my office after what you've written against me!" To which Tagla answered, "To my knowledge I am in Rolo's office and had I known there was a shadow of Menache hovering over it I would not have come. But I am here as a creditor and not a debtor." "These are my premises," Menache huffed. "Then I'm leaving," Tagla answered and he walked out the door.

The following day, Tagla wrote to Rolo saying, "I visited your office yesterday in order to speak to you about some business I have with you. I left because I was insulted by a person who I did not know was your partner. Please be informed that I will not let this incident pass quietly." He concluded by asking Rolo to visit him.

Rolo appeared in Tagla's office in Alexandria at the appointed time and offered "his abject apologies". Tagla in turn told Rolo to inform M. Felix Souares, the uncle of Menache, of the incident. Eventually, by way of apology, Rolo offered to pay off Tagla's account and close the incident. Tagla, however, told them that he had to go to Cairo and that it would be better to see M. Felix Souares personally to settle the matter.

On Wednesday, 24 April, Felix Souares and Rolo met with the director of *Al-Ahram*. After expressing their disapproval of the Baron's behaviour they asked Tagla to publish a response to the reports that were carried in *Al-Muqattam* about the incident. Tagla read the statement which they had prepared in advance but refused to publish it because it did not do him justice. "Since my newspapers have not published a word of this incident I will not publish this," Tagla told them.

Al-Ahram was keen to preserve the public side of the animosity. If he allowed it to degenerate into a personal vendetta, he would be playing into the hands of Souares and Menache. This is why he escalated his campaign against the brokers at the stock exchange.

On 20 April, while Mohamed Tawfiq, *Al-Ahram's* correspondent at Alexandria's stock exchange, was drinking his usual cup of coffee, "a group of the Baron's burst in, shouted and huddled their way around the premises and converged upon Tawfiq and swore at him and menaced him. They said, 'fire purifies sins' and, in the middle of the

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Just about the time that duels over matters of honour were a dying tradition in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century, a foreign Jewish stockbroker in

Egypt created a sensation by throwing the gauntlet at the publisher and editor of *Al-Ahram*. The businessman accused Bichara Tagla of having insulted him in published articles. The duel challenge eventually fizzled out, but the episode led to bitter attacks in the Egyptian press on stockbrokers and their speculation mechanisms on the exchange which ruined many Egyptians. Dr Yunan Labib Rizq tells the story on the basis of *Al-Ahram's* reports

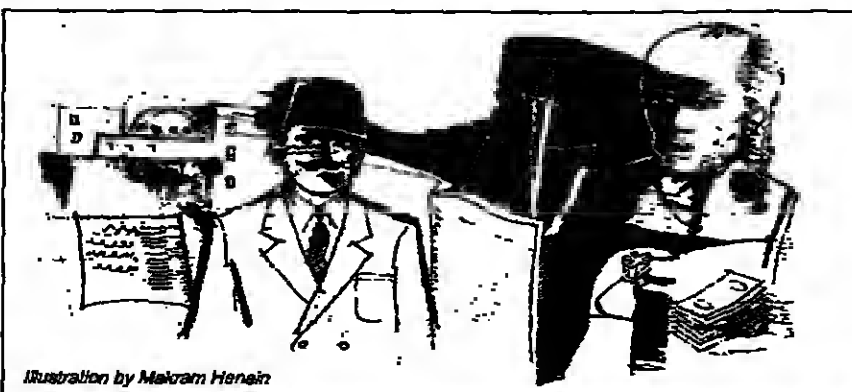


Illustration by Makram Henein

stock exchange, they set fire to several issues of *Al-Ahram*, while shouting, 'Long live the brokers and long live the stock exchange and down with *Al-Ahram*!'"

Al-Ahram responded with a rallying cry of its own. "Long live the wealth of the nation and long live Egypt and the Egyptians! Down with its enemies who squander its wealth, deplete its finances and toy with its future!" It then warned of how the country was being destroyed by a handful of brokers and financiers "who are like leeches sucking the nation's blood." They may attempt to buy off the newspapers and purchase the pens of writers, it said, "but they will die of their own intrigues before *Al-Ahram* becomes party to the ruin of the nation!"

In a later issue, *Al-Ahram* told this story: Late one evening, *Al-Ahram* adversaries sent some men to steal *Al-Ahram's* plaque from the entrance to its offices. Tagla interpreted it as a warning and his reaction was vehement. "We reported to the police that our bronze name plaque was stolen... *Al-Ahram* has no enemies but those who plunder the nation. So, come forth and attack, enemies of the nation, for in so doing you expose yourselves and your deeds to the nation."

On 23 April, *Al-Ahram* dedicated most of its front page to one of the letters that have "flooded" its offices. The letter, entitled "You have done your duty", was taken by *Al-Ahram* to vindicate its position. The author, "S.M. from Cairo", wrote, "I can testify to the truth that you have spoken with

regard to speculation on the stock exchange and to the losses it has caused. This is not the testimony of a single individual but of many in the nation."

The Jewish financiers devised a solution — the duel — and we resume once again the story as related by *Al-Ahram*. The two witnesses chosen by Menache asked Bichara Tagla to select two people to be his witnesses in the duel. Tagla complied and nominated Alfred Eid and Paul Mans. Whereupon negotiations commenced. The negotiations would take a curious course, since the parties had two different objectives. Menache wanted to have a duel and Tagla wanted to avoid one. After much give-and-take the witnesses of the two parties agreed that there was no cause for a duel. They decided to issue a statement saying that Tagla had no intention of sullying the honour of the Baron. Unfortunately, they differed over the wording. Menache wanted the statement worded in the form of an apology. Tagla "refused to add another word." The negotiations broke down and Menache's witnesses revived the idea of the duel. "The witnesses for our director, however, insisted that they saw no cause for a duel and said, 'Either you agree to appoint an arbitrator or we shall withdraw.'"

Tagla ended the controversy with a statement adamantly refusing a duel. The statement quoted an explanation offered by the newspaper *Misbah Al-Shariq*, indicating he subscribed to it. "Since when has it been considered fair that someone who has had a

life-long training in the martial arts and has become an expert at swordsmanship and other such skills (meaning Menache) should challenge a person who knows no other weapon than the pen (Tagla) and expect him to accept? Would not this constitute murder?" No taint of shame or cowardice can be attached to the owner of *Al-Ahram* for refusing the challenge to a duel. *Misbah Al-Shariq* continued, "Such a contest is no test of courage. It is a test of skill acquired after long experience. One would think it more befitting of the Baron and his cohorts to give up this foolishness and stop taking the law into their own hands."

However, such a titillating incident would not die down so quickly. Most other newspapers, with the exception of *Al-Muqattam*, sided with *Al-Ahram*. Some, however, questioned how he could have allowed the Baron to enter *Al-Ahram* headquarters "with a whip in his hand and then leave without so much as a bruise on his body, a broken bone or a scratch on his head. This indeed is sin for which Bichara Tagla cannot be forgiven." In response, *Al-Ahram* was obliged to issue a statement. When the Baron came, it said, "our director was away and the administration offices were empty. However, those who were on the premises saw Alfred enter in that audacious manner but they did not recognise him. It was only the doorman who remembered him when he caught sight of him speeding away in his carriage."

Moreover, soon after Tagla's refusal to meet Menache's challenge to a duel, the Baron announced to the press that Tagla had insulted him by slighting the character of his sister, the wife of one of his business associates. Once again, *Al-Ahram* was forced to issue a denial. It took the occasion to quote from *Al-Ra'id Al-Masri* which said regarding this incident, "If there were any truth to this, Tagla Pasha would indeed be the subject of censure, for the home and family have no bearing on affairs of business and commerce. It is our belief, however, that this is a groundless rumour that has no basis in fact whatsoever." *Al-Ahram* commented on this, saying, "The issues of *Al-Ahram* are in the hands of our honourable colleagues of the press. From them you will learn that the Baron's allegation is a preposterous lie. Alfred Menache now has the audacity to bring women into his denunciations. We will, therefore assume on his behalf the appropriate solicitude for honour and remain silent... for we hold honour, even if it is that of others, as too precious to taint."

At the same time, *Al-Ahram* stepped up its campaign against stockbrokers. Here, it pressed into service Mohamed Tawfiq, the newspaper's correspondent at the Alexandrian Stock Exchange, who, on 8 May 1901 supplied *Al-Ahram* with just the material it was looking for. Tawfiq reports that on the previous morning as he was passing near the stock exchange he noticed that a large crowd had assembled. He drew closer in order to discover what all the commotion was about. "It was a heart-rending scene," he wrote. "There were three evidently well-

to-do men from the countryside who were in a state of utter despair and desperation." These rural merchants from Fum Al-Mahnukeya had been duped by a stockbroker into buying a thousand qantars (approx. 50,000kg) each of cotton. As the price of cotton climbed, they urged the broker to sell. But every time, the broker asked them to be patient until it was too late. The prices dropped and the broker sold it off at a loss, "bringing ruination to our houses," as they said. When the country gentlemen attempted to enter the stock exchange, they were kept out by the doorman. Then the guilty broker appeared in the window and told them to leave. "Sue me in court!" he shouted. "The men turned away, crying in the middle of the street!"

The newspaper also continued to publish letters from its readers who had also been burned by speculators at the stock exchange. "Between Speculation and Gambling" was the title of one such letter that bled. "You say that speculation on the stock exchange is a purely commercial activity and that commerce is a natural and legitimate profession. Indeed, so it may be, but only when it is governed by a strict set of laws that restrict this activity to competent practitioners, not when its doors are opened to everyone and his brother!" When activity on the stock exchange is so laissez-faire, the writer concludes, gambling is a safer bet.

In addition, *Al-Ahram* cited passages from other newspapers that took part in this campaign. One newspaper quoted in *Al-Ahram* asks, "Is the stockbroking profession in Egypt advantageous or detrimental to the country? Do all stockbrokers deal with their clients in accordance with the principles of honour and integrity?" After giving a categorical no to its questions, the newspaper wondered why Menache would show such zeal for such a profession.

It was only when Lord Cromer, the British high commissioner, published his weekly report in May 1901 that the storm finally blew over. He wrote, "I have acquired sufficient information to make a most perceptive nature has occurred in Alexandria and Cairo, bringing ruination to many and provoking panic among others." He advised Egyptians "to avoid engaging in such activities with which they are poorly acquainted for their inexperience would most likely bring disaster upon themselves."

Al-Ahram rejoiced as never before with regard to a pronouncement from the British high commissioner. Having found itself so publicly vindicated, it could not resist a final jab. Perhaps now, it suggested, the Souares and the Menaches should seek into the British High Commission to steal its plaque as they did to *Al-Ahram*.

The author is a professor of history and head of *Al-Ahram* History Studies Centre.

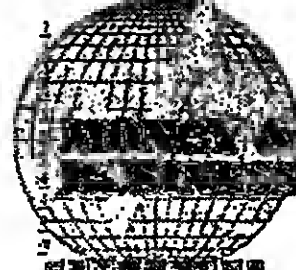


Egyptian products in China

THE EGYPTIAN cabinet headed by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri received a report presented by Ahmed Guwaili, minister of trade and food supply, on the Egyptian products exhibition which will be held in China from 25-30 October.

The report indicated that the high-quality products manufactured in Egypt will upgrade exportation and thereby redress the trade balance between Egypt and China which has recently been in favour of China.

MONEY & BUSINESS



New factories in Assiut

FIFTY new factories will be set up in Assiut's industrial zone, said Ragaa El-Tahlawi, governor of Assiut, during his tour of the new projects' sites.

El-Tahlawi added that he assigned a panel of university professors to check the designs of investors' projects and assess the proposals to classify industrial zones according to the kind of projects. Housing for entrepreneurs near their projects' sites is also under consideration.

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NBE's role in employing new graduates

THE NATIONAL Bank of Egypt (NBE) plays a pioneering role in boosting the economic reform policy and mitigating its negative social repercussions. To this end, the bank has assumed the role of a financing channel in implementing the programme of the Social Development Fund thanks to its unrivaled specialised banking expertise.

Therefore, NBE has embarked upon co-operating with the Egyptian Banking Group for Distribution and the Social Development Fund to manage the credit tranche accounting for LE50m, allocated by the fund for the first phase of the project of managing developed trade (envisaged to be implemented in four phases within a 5-year span).

The first phase of the project aims at establishing 100 individual or collective opportunities for youth in the field of distributing foodstuffs and consumer goods. Such state of facts would alleviate the negative effects concomitant with the economic reform policy in the Egyptian market in respect of foodstuffs and consumer goods. This in turn would achieve integration with the productive projects of youth.

Finance is confined to trade and the distribution of the consumer goods and foodstuffs (wholesale and half wholesale system) in the geographical regions affiliated to Cairo and mid-Delta governorates. The maximum credit limit amounts to LE50,000 for the individual project and LE200,000 for

collective ones (with a maximum of four partners). However, in the case of important projects such limits can be increased on condition of furnishing the necessary warrants and obtaining approval from the Social Development Fund.

Interest on loans stands at just 8 per cent and grace periods are to be determined in accordance with the nature of the project. The said loans granted to beneficiaries are utilised in the working capital, accommodating the project premises and equipment used for preserving the foodstuffs.

In fact, NBE, given its position on top of the Egyptian banking system exerts relentless efforts to fan the flames of the Egyptian economic reform programme.

Business news

Promoting tourism

MAMDOUH El-Beltagi, minister of tourism, is scheduled to inaugurate a seminar for a tourism promotion to take place next September.

The two-day seminar will discuss means of increasing tourism to Egypt from Europe, North America and Southeast Asia.

El-Beltagi assigned Adel Abdel-Aziz, chairman of the Egyptian Tourism Authority to preside over the committee responsible for organising the seminar. He is also in charge of providing the follow-up on preparations for the conference.

The committee will invite delegates and high-ranking officials from participating countries and will set up an information centre which will supply participants with brochures in seven languages.

Squash Expo '96 at Heliopolis Sporting Club

GHAZALA Marketing Company will sponsor an exhibition — Squash '96 — at the Heliopolis Sporting Club from 30 October - 3 November 1996. The event will feature special appearances by Egypt's squash champions, with Ahmed Barada at the forefront.

The exhibition will promote Egyptian products for the winter season, featuring fashion shows, and companies working in the field of touristic villages, appliances, furniture, computers, leather goods, jewellery, clothing and sporting goods.

For more information, call 261-3948/ 482-9437.

Right computer solutions

MICRO Computer Systems (MCS), one of the latest software companies in Egypt, is dedicated to present the latest software to satisfy customers' needs.

Eng. Amr Ammar, owner and general manager of MCS, said that his company is developing Al-Mohaseb, one of the most powerful accounting systems in Egypt and the Middle East.

Al-Mohaseb is easy to install and use, and requires no computer or accounting experience. It supports both Arabic and English languages, and can be used on a multi-user system.

MCS can also customise and install software according to the requests of clients. The company also provides training courses as well as technical support.

IAA head to visit Cairo



Norman Vale, IAA director-general

Norman Vale, director-general of the IAA, based at the headquarters in New York, is visiting Cairo from 27-29 September. The objective of his visit is to review with the IAA Congress Organising Committee the programme for the forthcoming IAA-World Congress in Cairo in 1998.

During his trip, Vale will visit the Cairo International Conference Centre where the meeting will be inaugurated, as well as the Semiramis Intercontinental Hotel, where the meeting's 3-day sessions will take place. Likewise, Vale will take time to visit some of Egypt's touristic sites.

Banque Misr Esso card



Essam El-Ahmed, chairman of Banque Misr

ALWAYS keen to provide its clients with the latest services, Banque Misr, is issuing now the Esso Visa Card, provided free of charge for holders of Banque Misr Master Cards.

Esso Visa cards have an LE500 limit per month. Cardholders may use the card for all purchases from Esso gas stations all over Egypt that are provided with point of sale machines that accept the card and deduct the amounts from holders' accounts. The cards can currently be used at 75 gas stations throughout Cairo and Alexandria, which will be expanded to further cover Egypt in the second phase. A statement of Esso card purchases are sent to clients at the end of each month.

هكذا من الأصل

MONEY & BUSINESS



EICC to offer MCI calling cards



Eng. Khalid Youssef Zaazaa



Yousryah El-Ashram

The telecommunication sector is vital for investment; there can never be an investment zone without a modern telecommunications service.

While the Egyptian government is doing its best to create a suitable atmosphere for investment through certain regulations, the private sector plays a great and efficient role in establishing an infrastructure for investment.

Based on its faith of the private sector's role in creating a good atmosphere for investment in Egypt, the Egyptian International Communications Company (EICC) is contributing in solving telecommunication problems in Egypt.

The following is an interview with Engineer Khalid Youssef Zaazaa, chairman of the board of EICC.

Why did you choose the field of telecommunications for your business?

On the threshold of the 21st century, no one can imagine public or private lives without telecommunications. Because without it, human activities such as politics, economy, security, and society will cease to exist. Telecommunications are now considered the backbone of life. Success in any field or industry depends on several factors, the most important of which is time. Achieving the best results too late is like achieving nothing at all. Thus, the time factor is vital and is considered one of life's most important strategies in any field of business in or outside Egypt.

The world is now a global village. And with the increase of speed in economic and trade transactions, telecommunications such as telephones, and fax machines are not indispensable. Within the fast lives we currently lead, urgent meetings are held through several telephone lines. In addition, signing contracts and exchanging documents is done through fax machines. Conferences between individuals or organisations can be held through a modern system known as teleconference networking. All this is because the time factor is crucial in many aspects of life like politics, economy and social life.

But does Egypt use the most modern technology in telecommunication and to what extent? And is the atmosphere here in Egypt suitable to use such technology?

I would like to stress that we live, during the time of President Hosni Mubarak, in a thriving technological era, not only in the field of telecommunications, but in all fields. President Mubarak realised the importance of science and technology in achieving economic progress and increasing investment in Egypt. President Mubarak has opened the doors wide open to the private sector, to implement all kinds of activities in all fields. The private sector now feels a sense of security, encouragement, and stability which is needed to increase its output. In my capacity as an Egyptian working in the field of telecommunications since 1976, I have seen a real breakthrough in telecommunications within Egypt take place during the last decade. Especially since Minister of Transportation and Civil Aviation Soliman Metwalli has included acquiring the most talented and capable persons working in the field as part of his agenda. These people are highly skilled, devoted and reliable. They bear the responsibility of development in the field of modern technology and telecommunications. On top of this list are the President of the National Organisation for Telecommunications Osman Lotfi, and President of the International Telecommunications Sector Mokhtar Ghoneim who, together adopt modern ideas and policies that will render the best services to the Egyptian citizen.

Since you are an International expert in telecommunications, what should be the role of the private sector, and is there an opportunity for it now?

Like the rest of the world, our government is convinced that the private sector should bear the greater responsibility of implementing the infrastructure in its country. In my view, I think the private sector can contribute by the following:

- Enhancing the standard of telecommunication services and taking the burden off the shoulders of the government.
- Increasing the number of citizens who benefit from telecommunications like travellers.

What does EICC have to offer in Egypt that's new?

After negotiations with the American company MCI, we are now authorised to sell the MCI Exchange Card (Prepaid) and the MCI Calling Card (Hemisphere). We are marketing the former which serves a great number of Egyptian citizens who will be able to make international phone calls from any place.

As for vice-president of the company's board, Yousryah El-Ashram, she says that MCI cards offered by the company will add a new vital service for many people working in travel, as well as tourists or visiting businessmen who need an easy and quick way to make phone calls. It is also useful for Egyptians who need to contact their relatives in far away places like Sinai or the North Coast where there aren't enough international lines. MCI cards also reduce expenditures on international phone calls Egyptians need to make to get in touch with their relatives in Europe and the USA. Using the MCI card for many calls can reduce the cost of international phone calls in Egypt by more than 70 per cent.

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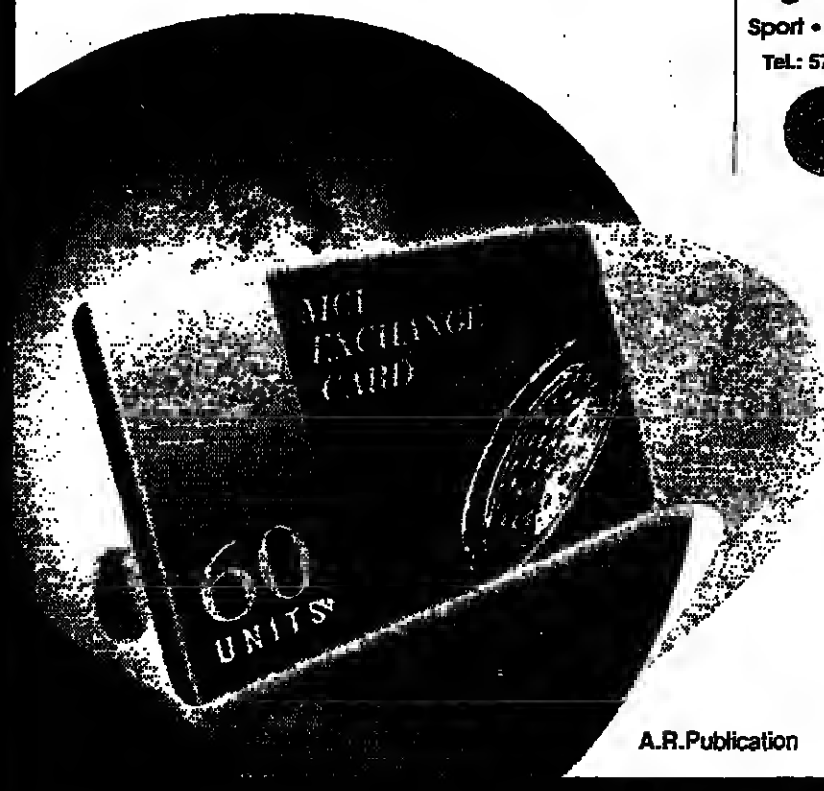
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Visions and phantasms

For nearly three decades, various Israeli prime ministers have understood that it is in everyone's best interest to take a step down the road to peace with their Arab neighbours. As a result a series of treaties and accords have been hammered out.

Enter Binyamin Netanyahu — a man with a vision of peace that has apparently eluded both Israelis and Arabs alike. Security is peace, he says, adding that Israel will accept no pre-conditions for the resumption of the final status negotiations and will not accede to a land-for-peace deal. Rather, it is the Arab world that should know how to live with Israel's vital security interests, for example by agreeing to the Lebanon First option he proposed to Syria's Assad.

Should anyone have the audacity to question why the Arabs must make concessions while Netanyahu remains intransigent, then the likely answer could be the one proffered when he encouraged Syria and Lebanon to find a solution to the Hizbullah problem. "Because if not, there is likely to be an escalation and this would no doubt be very painful to the other side."

But as prime minister, Netanyahu must have calculated the risks associated with actions such as expanding the settlement, violating the principles of Madrid and the Oslo Accords and, most recently, opening a tunnel under Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque — a move which triggered widespread Palestinian protests in this city. He must have also anticipated the need to use rubber bullets to disperse the second wave of Palestinian demonstrators in Hebron, who were demanding that the city's vegetable market be opened as decreed in last year's Israel-PLO interim agreement. And, as a leader with remarkable insight into both the Arab and Israeli mindsets, he must have predicted that Assad would react to Israel's repeated back-tracking and threats by positioning a crack team of commandos on Mount Hermon.

Finally, upon evaluating the situation, he must have decided that the Arabs will bow to his demands and finally see the light. And in this, he has seen what no present or past Israeli officials have been able to see — hell freezing over.

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Boycotting Israel: A means or an end? [1]

Many might see in the current breakdown of the peace process a vindication of the policy of boycotting Israel. **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** argues that wisdom and statesmanship might plead for a different course of action

If the acuteness of a conflict is measured in terms of the number of casualties it claims, then the Arab-Israeli conflict is not among the most intense. However, if the yardstick is the amenability of a conflict to resolution, then the Arab-Israeli conflict, which has been more resistant to all attempts at resolving it than any other conflict, is one of the most intense in recent history.

Let us compare it, for example, to the historic conflict between France and Germany. In less than a century, the two countries fought three wars (in 1870, 1914-18, 1939-45), which caused devastating damage, claimed tens of millions of victims and led to deep psychological scars. And yet today a close Franco-German alliance has become the backbone of European unity. Although the casualty figures in all the Arab-Israeli wars are nowhere near as high, enmity to Israel remains as bitter as ever for most Arab elites, particularly intellectuals who do not feel they have to toe the state line. Such independent-thinking elites constitute the consciousness of any nation, and in Egypt it is they who continue to boycott all Israelis after nearly two decades of formal peace. This is a paradox that requires an explanation.

Before going any further, however, it must be noted that a collective stand adopted by a nation's intelligentsia cannot simply be dismissed as an irrational attitude based on an emotional reaction provoked by frustration. Any collective stand is grounded on rational reasons, even if they are not immediately apparent. It is only by thoroughly investigating the reasons that do justify the adoption of an apparently irrational attitude that we can discard the reasons that do not. Addressing these reasons is the only way to control a situation; ignoring them keeps us hostage to the situation and at the mercy of its dynamics. In this article, I will try to highlight what I believe to be three main reasons for the

continued boycott of Israelis by Egyptian elites.

The first reason is due to a feature that is specific to the Arab-Israeli conflict which, unlike other regional conflicts, is not played out between protagonists who have always enjoyed a historical/geographical continuum in the region. In the case of France and Germany, for example, the two nations have always lived side by side. When they did clash, it was over border problems (Alsace-Lorraine) or over the ambition of one of them to play the leading role in continental Europe. However acute the conflict became, there was never a question of either state challenging the other's right to exist, as is the case in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

For Israel has not enjoyed an uninterrupted existence in the Middle East. Israelis invoke Biblical texts and archeological finds to back their claim that the kingdom of Israel existed before the Jewish Diaspora began over two thousand years ago. The persecution Jews suffered in many parts of the world, notably in eastern and central Europe, which reached a peak under the Nazis, strengthened their resolve to establish a Zionist state in Palestine. But the creation of Israel entailed the dispossession of an indigenous population that had lived on the land for centuries, and it is small wonder that the Israel's existence enjoys no legitimacy in the eyes of the original inhabitants of the region. And so political trends in the Arab world will continue to challenge the legitimacy of Israel's presence in the heart of the Arab world as long as Israel refuses to find a proper solution to the problem of Palestinian civilities.

Thus, Israel's very existence constitutes an act of aggression for a substantial portion of Arab public opinion, which is entitled to this opinion as long as Israel does not demonstrate by deeds,

not only by words, that its presence in the region could become an asset, not a liability, for its Arab environment. The problem is that Israel's ability to present such assurances is hampered by the teachings of Zionism, which place the interests of the Jews above all other considerations.

The second reason is related to certain watershed events in the peace process itself, notably Sadat's Jerusalem trip which was regarded by the bulk of the Arab intelligentsia not as a breakthrough towards peace but, rather, as a separate endeavour at the expense of the Palestinian cause standing at the very heart of the dispute. However, when the Oslo Agreements were signed by all Arab parties as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, many Arab, including Egyptian, intellectuals opposed these agreements on the grounds that they did not uphold Palestinian rights. In the light of this development, questions have been raised as to whether the initial critique of the Sadat line was because it opened the door to a separate peace, or because the very idea of peace is rejected.

Of course, there are good reasons to question the validity of the peace process itself. By keeping its nuclear option outside the peace talks, Israel clearly intends to retain absolute military superiority. By insisting that Jerusalem will remain its undivided and eternal capital, Israel is imposing its spiritual hegemony over the Holy City at the expense of Muslim and Christian rights. And, any hope that Israel may back down from its hard-line position on the question of the Palestinian right of self-determination has receded even further since Netanyahu came to power and removed all constraints on the establishment of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.

In the face of Netanyahu's blatant breach of the basic premises of the peace process, Arab

governments are more than ever affirming their commitment to peace as a "strategic option". This has widened the breach, not to say the credibility gap, between government policy on the one hand and wide sections of Arab public opinion, including the intelligentsia, on the other, at a time when the Arabs have every interest in closing ranks against Netanyahu's defiance of the peace process.

The third reason relates to a landmark event in the history of the conflict, namely, Nasser's defeat in the 1967 war. Although it has become fashionable in certain quarters to blame Nasser for just about everything that is wrong with Egypt today, there is no disputing the fact that the man, and continues to stand, as a symbol of national dignity and pride. Rising from Egyptian peasant stock to rid the country of foreign domination for the first time in 25 centuries, he came to personify the sovereign will of a people who had lost control of their fate since the time of the Pharaohs. He asserted that control fearlessly, nationalising the Suez Canal, standing up to the triplicate aggression and building the High Dam. His defeat at the hands of the Israelis in 1967 dealt a severe blow to the Egyptian, and indeed Arab, psyche and acquired a symbolic significance going far beyond a military defeat. How can there be talk of fraternising with the instruments of that defeat, a defeat rendered even more traumatic by the arrogance and callousness with which the Israelis killed defenseless Egyptian POWs in cold blood?

These then are three of what I believe to be the four main reasons which justify, or at least go far towards explaining, why boycotting Israelis remain a deep-rooted attitude. But for boycott to become an effective action rather than reaction, it must remain a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Towards a common Arab market

Arabs and Muslims looking for ways into the twenty-first century can't see the forest for the trees, writes **Adel Sabet**: no farther than their own front doors, they will find the framework for a common market

The Arab League has been criticised in recent years for having no long-term policy, deficient information and public relations machinery, and an organisational attitude characterised by surprising inertia towards major problems of concern to the Arabs. Its feebleness in defence of Lebanon when it was attacked by the Israelis, its lackluster support for the ethnic Muslims of the former Yugoslavia, and its embarrassed silence in the face of Russia's genocide of the Chechens, has deeply disappointed its friends. What then can it do to justify its existence?

An organisation such as the League must be acutely conscious of the ambience in which it exists. The League is a world body and must seek its identity and purposes within a global environment. A look at the world situation as it stands today is in order.

The industrial exploitation of the so-called developing world is fast coming to an end. Major transformations were to be expected. The first of these is the termination of the Cold War which required huge and ruinous purchases of war material by the industrial countries mopping the barriers of confrontation. This resulted in the stockpiling and purchase of military stores and the spending of vast sums on behalf of the research and development of increasingly sophisticated weapons of war. These warlike preparations acted as a major stimulus to the US economy in the Reagan years. Now a recession has set in which has caused the armaments industries to lose a substantial percentage of their income and profits. The same applies to military production in Europe.

In another sphere, we are confronted with a steady decline in the areas of former colonial exploitation as an increasing number of formerly subject or dependent peoples achieve their independence and develop import-

substitution policies. In yet another sector we are witnessing the rise of a new Far Eastern technical industrial empire whose marketing needs threaten important areas of Western industrial exploitation.

The recent quarrels between Japan and the US over what was once an automobile industry dominated by the US may well spread to include many other consumer products. Should we therefore sit back in the expectation of new conflagrations, or even new industrial wars? An ominous aspect of this comes from the evident polarisation of the centres of industrial power: on one side the West (ironically including the Russian Commonwealth), and on the other the Far Eastern technological and industrial challenge.

There is a lesson to be learned here. Industries need markets. Markets need consumers. The Arab and Muslim world represents millions of consumers whose living standards are so low that their development would represent a major factor in a world economic recovery. As things stand, these consumers could well represent the target for imperialism of a new kind.

After Suez, Vietnam, Afghanistan and the recent Somali experience, the days of gunboat imperialism seem to have died. The territorial imperative and old colonialist procedures have become too dangerous and the old-fashioned patterns of power disappeared in the ashes of the British and French empires. Though the territorial incentive is no longer attractive, it could well be replaced by a new form of predatory colonialism. This would target the consumers of the distressed world, whose needs will propose attractive new markets. Even now, industrial investment is moving towards funding the growth of new consumer societies. The financing of a future con-

sumer society via credits and loans is an accepted procedure. Yet the methods used are creating an unbalanced growth situation which provokes tensions and unwanted consequences.

In Egypt, for instance, subsidies on wheat purchases and agricultural exports from the US have inhibited Egyptian agricultural output to the extent that Egypt, once self-sufficient, must now import over 50 per cent of its food from abroad. This in effect amounts to the subsidising of American wheat production by the American government at the expense of the Egyptian farmer, at a time when inflationary pressures desperately demand an increase in Egyptian production.

The piecemeal allocation of aid credits within bilateral arrangements have promoted inflation and frustrated efforts to create inter-Arab economic cooperation. This has contributed to the defeat of attempts to create an Arab common market. Its only positive effect has been to subsidise indirectly the production of the donor country. The influx of unwaged cash into the economies of recipient countries inhibits the growth of the GNP and is a direct cause of inflation, which in turn promotes price hikes and the debasement of the national currency. The latter results in a serious loss of purchasing power. This situation imposes on the Egyptian economy the acute need to subsidise basic consumer items and to make the citizen vulnerable to the easy credit policies of a foreign entity who will exploit Egypt's distress in order to subsidise its own production.

Here, the Arab League is well equipped to step in. The idea of an Arab common market, first proposed in Azam Pasha's time, springs to mind. The Arab League states alone have over 200 million consumers; when these are extended to a Muslim market, one billion

consumers become available. If one regards consumers as assets to the economy, then we have here an extremely valuable capital asset. A vast machinery of economic cooperation and union can be created. An Arab/Muslim common market would dwarf the EEC and other such organisations.

It could take the shape of a non-political, non-religious commonwealth possessing an immense prestige in the world. It could be a stabilising factor in the clash between the West and the Far East, promoting coordination rather than confrontation. Since most of its component states are agricultural, intensive food production programmes can easily be promoted and put into action. Such a commonwealth could aim at reducing the price of food in the world, since it would control huge land areas which only need development to create and promote production. It would lead to the development of an international food industries authority and, in doing so, bring about a major change in a demographically threatened world. It would help face the challenge of future demography.

Last and by no means least, it would help discourage the hoarding of food in the industrial countries, a practice which has pushed the cost of living up to prohibitive levels. It would likewise discourage the wanton waste of food, such a common feature of the urban West.

Unfortunately there will be many who will regard the opinions expressed here as impractical and utopian. To these we might ask: Should we therefore resign ourselves to becoming the economic satellites of the great industrial powers of the world? Should the mile of our children be that of a convenient consumer society supplying the industrial nations of the West and the Far East with new markets for their goods at the price of a lower standard of living, and permanent underdevelopment?

Weapons of reason

By Naguib Mahfouz

How can Third World governments that censor the media stop something from appearing in the press if the public can see it on television via satellite dishes, or if people can download it through the Internet?

If everything becomes possible and permissible, we are bound to clash with many things that go against our traditions, customs and culture. What must we do?

In my opinion, the solution lies in the strengthening of our cultural heritage. We must increase its immune system so that it can withstand the cultural invasion sweeping over us like a tidal wave. Only an educational revolution adapted to the age of information can achieve this goal.

Thinking or exercising the brain is what distinguishes human beings from other creatures. But some educational systems in developing countries are not designed with a view to teaching students how to think, how to reach conclusions that may differ from the textbook. Creative thinking is encouraged and rewarded abroad, whereas here any departure from the textbook is punished. A student who dared to express an original idea would be immediately failed for not repeating what he had been taught.

But if we can succeed in properly educating young people, we need not worry about what they hear or see. They will be protected by the most powerful weapon in the world — the rational mind.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Al-Ahram: "Egypt is using everything in its power, including the economic conference, to save the peace process. The ball is now in the other side's court. If they wish to see a successful conference, they should honour their commitments. But to cling to hackneyed intransigent stances will lead the Arabs to reject steps towards economic normalisation... This summit, or others like it, will be of no avail, for no side can force the others to cooperate without mutual trust." (Editorial, 20 September)

Rose El-Youssef: "It is all very confusing, but Netanyahu's illogical actions raise fears that he intends to start a new war in the region. I do not think he is capable of doing this as the decision is not his alone and Egypt is capable of cutting him down to size without much effort. The best thing is to leave him to talk and talk until he hits rock bottom." (Mahmoud El-Tokami, 23 September)

Al-Ahram: "Netanyahu is not a jockey in full control of his horse as he enters the race. He is full of slogans which he is unable to turn into implementable policies. He seeks a way out by saying 'no' to everything — a word most politicians avoid because it is not an expression of any policy." (Amin Howaidy, 18 September)

October: "Why does the US, the close friend of the Arabs, not help us find out who we are talking to in Tel Aviv? To an Israel which desires peace and signs peace accords and strives for talks with the Syrians? Or to an Israel which rejects peace, withdraws from negotiations and refuses to honour pledges and accords? The US could do us a big favour by telling us how to feel secure with Israel and trust the future. It could tell us who rules Israel at the moment — Dr Jekyll or Mr Hyde!" (Ragab El-Banna, 22 September)

Al-Ahram: "For quite some time Netanyahu and his government have been making provocative statements about Egypt. On one occasion he accused Egypt of halting normalisation. On another, of not being concerned about Israel's security and interested only in gaining Israeli concessions for the Palestinians and Syrians... And on yet another occasion he, in all insolence, complained to US envoy Dennis Ross of Egypt's 'unspeakable con-

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

duct towards Israel' — stopping short of asking him to persuade the US administration to send its fleet to the Egyptian coast to teach the Egyptian people a lesson like it did with Iraq." (Ibrahim Sa'eda, 23 September)

Al-Shaah: "By refusing to sign the treaty banning nuclear tests, India has given us all a lesson in preserving national interests and pursuing an independent policy without succumbing to pressures no matter how great... Both India and Egypt started together on the path of non-alignment but now things are different: India went along a path of true independence, while we have to change our stances according to outside pressures." (Qub El-Arabi, 20 September)

Al-Ahram: "It is truly amazing that Israel's premier should criticise Egypt for holding large-scale manoeuvres — the same Netanyahu who has stopped the peace process and who refuses to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or to heed the Egyptian initiative to clear the region of weapons of mass destruction. It seems that his philosophy is that all the nations around Israel should disarm because Israeli security requires that only Israel should have attack and defence capabilities!" (Editorial, 23 September)

Al-Arabi: "The Egypt that Israel would like to see is a broken reed that turns a blind eye to what Israel doing to the Arabs and approves of the American perspective that Israel should be stronger than all the Arabs put together. This perspective holds that Israel has a right in Arab lands and is the permanent representative of US interests in the region, numerous and appalling as they are." (Galal Aref, 23 September)

Al-Akhar: "The proof that Netanyahu is not thinking clearly is that he grants himself the right to protest against Egyptian army manoeuvres. He assumes that peace means that we should neglect raising our military capabilities when Israel is developing its nuclear arsenal and its missiles. It seems that his understanding of peace is an Israeli hegemony over a region populated by weak Arabs who do not dare to take advantage of science and technology." (Nabil Zaki, 22 September)

Compiled by Hala Sagor



When drawing Minister of Education Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin, I remembered the nose, chin and smile of Taha Hussein, the most prominent figure to have occupied the chair in which Bahaeddin now sits. The minister's features are friendly; they seem designed to encourage the youngsters sitting on school benches across the country to work hard and achieve good marks.

هكذا من الأصل

Close up

Salama A. Salama

The bogus nuptials

When Yasser Arafat, president of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), visited Germany recently to ask German industrialists and investors to invest in the Palestinian territories, he was told by the president of the German Chamber of Commerce and Industry that, in light of the present political situation in the region, it would be illogical for German private sector companies to make any long-term investments in Palestinian territory.

There can be no doubt, given the political situation prevailing in the Middle East, that no amount of attractive offers will induce foreign capital to enter into large scale joint ventures, such as those desired by the organisers and advocates of the economic summit in Cairo. For this reason, the preparations being made for the conference are purely speculative — the pursuit of a mirage.

This conclusion has been simply demonstrated in the past few days. There can be no doubt of its effect on the relations, elements and terms that form the framework of the Middle East peace process. It is abundantly clear that the Netanyahu government is intent on destroying the future of the process, and even those steps already achieved. Those who found excuses for the Israeli prime minister and asked that he be given a grace period were the victims either of self-delusion, or of a US-backed Israeli ruse — to the point that the US has insisted that the economic summit be convened on the determined date.

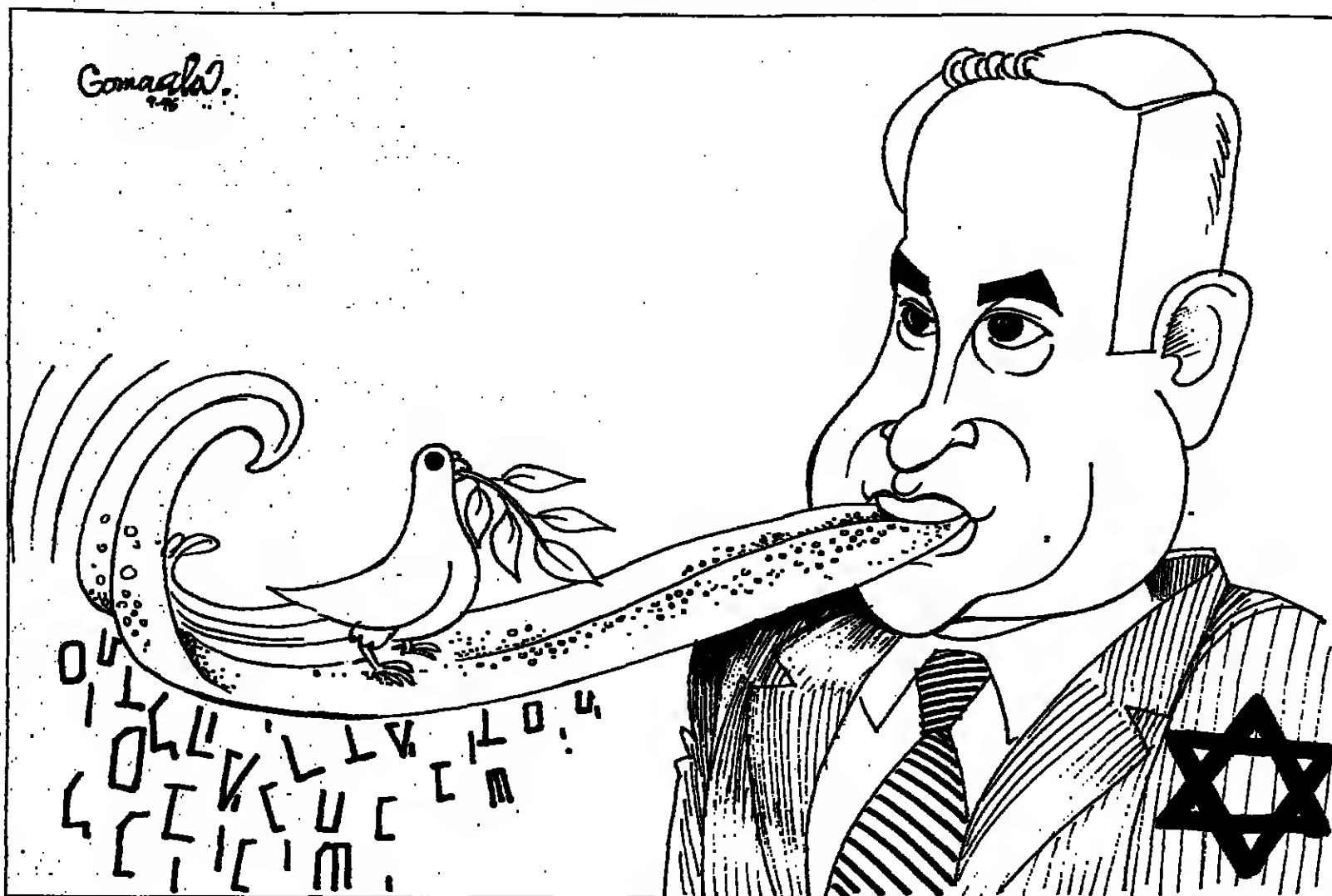
What other reason could there be for all these preparations for a conference which is expected to set out the terms for future economic and political cooperation in the region, and in which Israel is to be wedded to the Arab world, amidst the blare of the trumpets of US, Japanese and European banks and corporations. This takes place at a time when belligerence, if not outright preparation for war, prevails, when Syria and Israel are amassing forces along their borders in the Golan Heights and around the South Lebanon security zone, with Israel threatening Syria, Israeli air force attacks on Lebanese positions, the construction of new settlements and a freeze on Israeli-Palestinian agreements.

Indeed, why did Netanyahu pick the anniversary of Yom Kippur, the anniversary of the October War — to instigate a crisis with Egypt? Why did he inform US envoy Dennis Ross that he objected to the Egyptians calling their military manoeuvres "Badr-96", as he considered this tantamount to preparation for war against a "neighbouring" country — Israel (after 17 years of peace)?

What justification can there be for the convening of a conference which presumably would lead to agreements, financial obligations and investments with Israeli participation when Israel has reneged on its promises and disavowed its agreements with the Palestinians, when it has hampered negotiations with Syria? What kind of economic cooperation can emerge from this situation?

Egypt may have been obliged by a number of political considerations to proceed with preparations for the summit up to the very end. Among these considerations may be an attempt to prove good will to the last, though that needs no proving after all Egypt has done. They may reflect also a desire by Egypt to wash its hands of the summit's collapse — a virtual certainty in light of Israel's categorical retraction and the tension and escalation that Netanyahu's government has succeeded in fomenting in the region. Also, Egypt could have been responding to illogical American pressure, which can be understood only if we suppose that there is an American-Israeli plan to postpone or even freeze the peace process.

In four or five weeks we shall know for certain what lies behind the "wedding feast" which is being prepared so diligently. The reply Yasser Arafat received from the German industrialists, however, is a good suggestion of what the conference will provide — very probably before next November.



The politics of memory

As historians sift through the constructions of collective recollection, writes Edward Said, we as Arabs remain prisoners of amnesia — severed from our power to create an indigenous narrative

Shortly after the 1988 Palestine National Council meeting which I attended in Algiers, I was invited to participate in a public forum in New York with American Jewish supporters of Israel who considered the moment a propitious one for reconciliation and dialogue. One of the participants was a well-known Jewish philosopher who, although credited with a generally progressive and critical attitude, was also known to me as a particularly fervent supporter of Israel. In 1982, for example, he had publicly advocated the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in order to accomplish the political defeat of the PLO, and earlier he had spoken of supporting an Israeli policy of "helping" Palestinians leave Israel since their presence in the Jewish state was "marginal" to the nation. Nevertheless, I agreed to appear with him, perhaps as a way of assessing his present position.

He seemed exasperated by the new situation, and less inclined than most of the audience to take the Algiers Declaration seriously. At one moment I pressed home the whole history of Zionist abuses of the Palestinians, saying that it had to be taken account of in any exploration of a future peace. I was surprised when he replied with vehemence that Palestinians could have a state of their own so long as they lived their lives alone, away from Israelis. "Let's not go over the past," he said, "let's concentrate on the future" — a position which I criticised as being unjust to the victims of Israeli aggression. I also reminded him that Palestinian and Israeli histories were closely connected and could not so easily be separated.

Suddenly a woman in the almost entirely Jewish audience leapt to her feet and asked for the floor. She was outraged, she said, to the philosopher, that as a Jew he was asking Palestinians to forget about the past. "More than any other people on earth," she continued with increasing passion, "we Jews have looked back to our past, asking ourselves and all other people to remember the past, remember our sufferings, remember our achievements and accomplishments as a people, remember our prophets and traditions. How dare you tell a Palestinian that he should forget about the past? Don't you think that Palestinians too are entitled to their past, and don't they have a right, as we do, to claim their own history in their own way?" I recall that the man looked uncomfortable and somewhat embarrassed, although he did not venture a serious response.

Perhaps the greatest battle we Palestinians have waged as a people has been over the right to our presence, and with that presence, our right to possess and reclaim our historical reality, at least since the Zionist movement began its encroachments on our land. A similar battle has been fought by all colonised peoples whose past and present were dominated by outside powers who had first conquered the land, and then re-wrote history so as to appear in that history as the true owners of that land. Every independent state that emerged after the dismantling of the classical empires in the post-World War II years felt it necessary to narrate its own history, as much as possible free of the biases and misrepresentations of that history by British, or French, or Portuguese, Dutch and other colonial historians.

Yet the fate of Palestinian history has been a sad one, since not only did we not gain independence, but we also never understood the importance of constructing our own history as a part of trying to gain our independence. To become a nation in the formal sense of the word, a people must make itself into something more than a collection of tribes or political organisations of the kind that, since the

1967 war, Palestinians have created and supported. With any enemy as formidable as the Zionist movement, one of whose main efforts was to re-write the history of Palestine so as to exclude us as original inhabitants of the place, we cannot afford so grievous a gap in our national life.

What we never understood was the power of a narrative history to mobilise people around a common goal. In the case of Zionism, the narrative's main point was that Zionism's goal was to restore, re-establish, repatriate, and re-connect a people with its original homeland. It was the genius of Herzl and Weizmann to draft thinkers like Einstein and Buber, as well as financiers like Lord Rothschild and Moses Montefiore, into giving their time and effort in support of so important and historically justified a scheme. This narrative of re-establishment and recovery served its purpose not only amongst Jews, but also throughout the Western (and even in some parts of the Eastern) world. Because of the power and appeal of the Zionist narrative and idea (which depended on a special reading of the Bible), and because of our failure as a people to produce a convincing collective story with a beginning, middle, and end (we were always too disorganised, our leaders were always interested in maintaining their power, most of our intellectuals refused to commit themselves as a group to a common goal and we changed our goals and principles too many times) we have remained scattered and politically ineffective victims of Zionism, as it continues to take more and more of our land, our past, and our national existence away from us.

The perfect symbolism of how we have paid the price for not being sufficiently conscious of our history was when, at the White House ceremony in September 1993, Yitzhak Rabin spoke of a long history of Jewish suffering, and an enormous amount of Jewish blood and suffering, whereas Yasser Arafat did not even mention the whole history of Palestinian suffering and loss. "Thank you, thank you, thank you," he said as if to reward the victors with our total surrender and our abdication from our historical struggle.

Just how deliberate and sustained has been the Zionist assault on the history of Palestine, and how much attention has been paid over the years to the re-construction of Jewish history to suit the purposes of Zionism as a political movement, is made stunningly clear by the Scottish historian of the ancient Near East, Keith W. Whitlam, whose new book, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (Routledge, 1996) is of paramount importance. I have not seen any reviews or references to the book in either Arab or Western journals or newspapers, perhaps because the subject is a complicated and difficult one. Not being myself a scholar of the ancient world generally, nor of ancient Palestine in particular, I cannot make a judgment about some of the points that Whitlam makes; but I am able to judge what he says about modern scholarship on ancient Israel, and there I was very impressed with his careful, but nevertheless extremely audacious argument. In effect Whitlam is talking about two things: one, the politics of collective memory, and two, the creation by Zionist scholars and historians of an image of ancient Israel that is shaped by the ideological needs and pressures of the modern Zionist movement.

Collective memory is a relatively new field of study, but is now enjoying considerable attention among historians. It is commonly agreed that collective memory is

not an inert and passive thing, but a field of activity in which past events are selected, re-constructed, maintained, modified, and endowed with political meaning. In her 1995 book *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, the Israeli-American historian Yael Zerubavel shows how, before the late nineteenth century, the story of Masada was unknown to most Jews. Then in 1862 a Hebrew translation of the Roman sources of Masada in Josephus's *Wars of the Jews* was published, and in a short time the story was transformed by reconstruction into four important things: "a major turning point in Jewish history, a locus of modern pilgrimage, a famous archaeological site, and a contemporary political metaphor." When General Yigael Yadin excavated Masada after 1948, the expedition and two complementary aspects — an archaeological investigation and "the fulfilment of a national mission." In time, the actual place was the site of Israeli army ceremonies, a commemoration of Jewish heroism as well as a commitment to present and future military skill. Thus was a dim, relatively unknown incident in the past re-formulated consciously as a major episode in the nationalist programme of a modern state, Masada became a potent symbol of the Israeli national narrative of struggle and survival.

Whitlam presents a remarkable picture of how the history of ancient Palestine was gradually replaced by a largely invented image of ancient Israel, a political entity that in reality played only a small role in the area of geographical Palestine. According to Whitlam, ancient Palestine was the home of many diverse peoples and histories: it was the place where Jebusites, Canaanites, Moabites, Philistines and others lived and flourished. Beginning in the late 19th century, however, this more complex and rich history was silenced, forced aside, in order that the history of invading Israelite tribes, who for a time suppressed and displaced the native peoples, became the only narrative worth considering.

Thus the extinction of the indigenous population of Palestine in the late Bronze Age became an acceptable and gradually permanent feature of Jewish history for scholars like W. F. Albright, the leading historian of ancient Palestine during the early twentieth century, and made it possible to silence native Palestinian history as it was supplanted by the history of the incoming Israelites. Albright goes so far as to condone the destruction of the native inhabitants of ancient Palestine in favour of superior people: "From the impartial standpoint of a philosopher of history," he says, "it often seems necessary that a people of markedly inferior type (i.e. the ancient Canaanite Palestinians) should vanish before a people of superior potentialities, since there is a point beyond which racial mixture cannot go without disaster."

In its remarkably frank expression of racist attitudes, this statement by a supposedly objective scholar, who also happened to be the most influential figure in modern Biblical archaeology, is chilling. But it suggests the iron will of Zionism, in its desire to overcome obstacles in its path, even to the point of retrospectively condoning dispossession and even genocide. Whitlam proceeds to show how scholars like Albright and many others went on in their writing to construct "a large, powerful, sovereign and autonomous... state (which was) attributed to its founder David."

Whitlam shows how this state was in effect an invention designed to accompany the Zionist attempt in the

Soapbox

The road from Beijing

After the Beijing Conference, steps must be taken to improve Egyptian women's position in power transactions through a two-pronged strategy. This strategy would enable them to influence policy by increasing their representation in leadership roles and would provide support for their successful participation in the decision-making process.

Secondly, it would enhance their sources of power and enable them to use such sources effectively. Achieving the above goals requires that measures be taken at the levels of policy, legislation, research, information, training, advocacy and institution-building. The strategy should make maximum use of existing mechanisms such as government institutions, NGOs, political parties, labour unions and informal groups.

It should be based on the recognised rights of women in Islam and the Egyptian constitution. Both ensure women's welfare, for which the government, supported by civic society and international organisations, is responsible. Four basic rights are advocated by women in Islam:

The right to a source of income to meet their basic needs whether living alone or in a family; the right to ownership of economic assets independent of their husbands or families; the right to a healthy marital life, a decent divorce and protection from exploitation or violence throughout their life cycle; the right to education and income through their work.

The constitution prohibits discrimination on any grounds; gender-based inequality is unconstitutional, and women are entitled to rectification of discriminatory situations.

Egypt should benefit from the experiences of other countries, where enlightened interpretations of Islam reflect positively on women's well-being. This is the case in Tunisia, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The two Asian countries have a woman as a prime minister.



Hoda Badran

This week's Soapbox writer is the chairperson of the Arab Women's Alliance.

To The Editor

Not just a symbol

Sir — In reference to Bahaa Tahir's obituary of Dr Latifa Al-Zayyat (*Al-Ahram Weekly* 19-25 September), I would like to add that her heavy laugh was one of her most outstanding features. Even during her imprisonment, she never missed that sense of humour.

Personal Papers, published in Arabic, was her most sensitive work. She was one of those intellectuals who was capable of enriching the intellectual life of her country.

As a university professor of English literature, she gave both her colleagues and her students support, care and love. She was everything in one, failures and success, struggle and frustration, bitterness and joy, despair and hope.

She succeeded in drawing a true picture of Egypt calling for freedom, justice and independence. Briefly speaking, she was not merely a symbol, she was human, a cultural and historic heroine. Latifa Al-Zayyat will be remembered as a flowing stream of benevolence and love.

Zakir Kamel Halkin,
English language teacher
El Baher Secondary School for Girls
Cairo

Labour mobility?

Sir — In "The big return begins", Mona El-Fiqi (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 12-18 September) quotes the head of the General Division of Recruitment Companies at the Egyptian Federation of Chambers of Commerce as saying salaries for Egyptian workers in Israel are more than double those of the Gulf States. Also, the Dean of the Sadat Academy for Administrative Science found a growing preference in Arab countries for Asians because they work for less and that these

countries are trying to chase away Egyptians by slashing pay.

Labour mobility was understood as allaying the uneven distribution of resources in the Arab "nation" and being a surrogate for citizenship in the employing country. Is Arab unity in a reverse stage despite the flow of promotion assertions?

Joseph Lerner
Independent Media Review and Analysis
Jerusalem

Safer beaches

Sir — During my recent vacation to Nakheel Village in Al-Arish, I was unfortunate enough to see a man drown while he was trying to save two children.

Unfortunately there was no lifeguard to be seen and by the time three residents managed to rescue the young man, it was too late. I would like to thank them for their courage. The lifeguard appeared after half an hour, where was he when he was needed? I also noticed that there are no life-belts to be used in case of emergency on any of the beaches. I have travelled to many countries and I have always seen such belts at different points along the beaches, as well as lifeguards advising people if the sea is dangerous.

I think it would be a good idea if some kind of campaign giving advice on life saving and resuscitation in case of drowning would be shown on the television. It should also emphasise how dangerous the sea can be, especially the Mediterranean.

I thank you and hope that some action can be taken to make the beaches safer.

Doreen Briggs
Near City
Cairo

Letter to Arafat

The following is the text of a letter sent to President Arafat by 24 renowned intellectuals and writers, objecting to the PNA's decision to confiscate two Arabic books by Edward Said. The two books in question contain an Arabic translation of Said's articles on the Middle East peace process, published on this page since the signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993. The two confiscated volumes include an introduction by distinguished political analyst Mohamed Hassanin Helikal, and were published in Cairo by Dar Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi, a publishing house owned by Mohamed Fayed, the secretary-general of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights.

His Excellency Yasser Arafat
President of the Palestinian Autonomous Authority
Gaza City, Gaza

Your Excellency,
It has been widely reported, as in *The New York Times* for Sunday August 26, 1996 ("Palestine Security Agents Ban Books by Critic of Arafat"), that security services responsible to you have seized books written by Edward W. Said and carried them off from all bookstores in the Palestinian Autonomous Zones in Gaza and the West Bank. Furthermore, that the sale of his books has been forbidden in these same areas and in Palestinian bookstores in East Jerusalem.

This news is especially alarming at a time when

those around the world who support the aspirations of the Palestinian people are looking to your administration for evidence that any emerging Palestinian entity will try to found itself on basic democratic principles and will be guided by the principle of freedom of expression and dissent. This freedom necessarily includes Edward Said's expressions of difference with some of your current policies.

Edward Said is one of the most prominent, influential, and admired of cultural critics. In particular, his writings about the Palestinian experience have been an essential instrument in shaping opinions in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, and the Middle East that are favourably informed about the Palestinian cause. We therefore urge you in your own interests as well as in the interests of people everywhere to reaffirm his right to be heard in the areas where an effort has been made to silence him.

Sincerely,
Ronald Harwood, President, International PEN
Anne Holander, President, American PEN
Karen Kennerly, Exec. Director, American PEN
Adonis K. Anthony Appiah, Paul Auster
Niels Barfoed, Mahmoud Darwish, Jacques
Derrida, Allen Ginsberg, Gamal Al-Ghazali,
Gunter Grass, David Grossman, Naguib Mahfouz,
Kenzaburo Oe, Orhan Pamuk, Richard Poirier,
Antonia Shammas, Susan Sonntag, William Styron,
Jean Stein, Gore Vidal, Torsten Wiesel, Saadi
Youssef.



مَكْزَا مِنْ الْأَصْلِ

The compassionate rebel

Ferial J Ghazoui commemorates Latifa Al-Zayyat whose life and work, formed not just an example but a "touchstone of cultural life"

Latifa Al-Zayyat (August 8, 1923-September 10, 1996) belonged to a rare breed of intellectuals: principled without dogmatism, intimate without sentimentality, radiating presence without inflated ego — and because this kind of intellectual is becoming extinct in the cultural scene today, where sophistry and profiteering are quotidian fare, the loss of Latifa Al-Zayyat is doubly painful.

Scholar, critic, activist, and above all an artist, she struggled until her last days in what political pragmatists would call "lost causes": national integrity, the welfare of the poor, human rights, freedom of expression, resistance to normalisation with the Zionist state and rejection of all forms of imperialist hegemony. Her last political act was undertaken in hospital. Lying on her sick bed, she nevertheless signed a statement condemning the recent banning of Edward Said's books in his own country, by the Palestinian National Authority. Expressing her solidarity with Said and her indignation at censorship, Al-Zayyat raised a closed fist and said: "May the Resistance live!" It was probably the last sentence she voiced before her transfer to the intensive care unit.

Fifty years earlier, Latifa Al-Zayyat was equally involved in a popular revolt against the occupying British. In 1946 she was elected secretary-general of the National Committee for Students and Workers, and was known as a young leader who was able to move thousands of students at Cairo University with her political speeches. For half a century, Latifa Al-Zayyat kept the revolutionary spark alive, though there were years when her radicalism was latent, unable to be articulated.

In her funeral (usually a men's affair) at the Omar Makram Mosque women flocked — some taking the train from Assiut and Alexandria in a rush to bid her farewell and render her due homage. Egyptian women and Arab women from the Mashreq and the Maghreb came; those of her generation and others in their early twenties and all the ages in between joined in the grief. What makes Latifa Al-Zayyat so relevant to women of all ages? After all, she was self-effacing, never sought to promote herself, and was interested in listening rather than monologuing.

Her legendary attraction stems precisely from her refusal to become a legend or a star. She never claimed to be a superwoman, and she shunned efforts to depict her as extraordinary. In fact, she always reminded you of her vulnerability and timidity. She understood profoundly the vanity of success and was perfectly satisfied with dedicating herself to noble causes that seemed to others no more than exercises in futility.

Although Latifa Al-Zayyat seemed to us a larger-than-life figure, and we thought of her as mentor and role-model, she remained one of us and we could identify with her. Like a classical hero, she was way above the average and yet she had her *hamartia*, her errors of judgement, which she documented with moving candor in her autobiography. But unlike classical heroes who seem to be propelled by fate, unable to recognise their inner constitution, Latifa Al-Zayyat mastered the art of looking within herself and within her society. Her passion for truth led her to lay bare her innermost psychological and ideological mechanisms — something unparalleled in self-reflexive Arab discourse. Her compassion for others made her opt not for the comforts of her privileged class, but for a relentless struggle on behalf of the wretched, even though her convictions sent her to jail twice: once in her twenties under King Farouk and again in her fifties under President Sadat.

Professor of English Literature at Ain Shams University, Chair of the Criticism and Literature Unit at the Institute of Dramatic Arts, a member of numerous cultural committees, research institutes and women's and international writers' associations, Latifa Al-Zayyat was a touchstone in cultural life in Egypt who will be thoroughly missed. Her publishing record as a critic and literary theoretician, encompasses New Criticism, Feminist Criticism and Marxist Criticism. She devoted a whole book to the writings of Nabu Mahfuz; she analysed works covering the three literary genres: drama, narrative and poetry. Among others, she wrote on Youssef Idris, Tawfiq El-Hakim, Abdel-Rahman El-Shargawi, Sonallah Ibrahim, Salwa Bakr, Naguib Seroor, Jidali Osman, Mourid Al-Barghouti, Mohamed El-Boustati, Mahmoud Diyah, Mikhail Rouman and Alfred Farag. She devoted monographs in English to Ford Madox Ford, Ernest Hemingway, T S Eliot, D H Lawrence and T E Hulme. Her PhD dissertation on literary translation in Egypt 1882-1925 attests to her interest in culture. Latifa Al-Zayyat's creativity was of a very distinctive kind. She wrote only when she had something to say, and not out of professional impulse to be read. And once she produced a work — no matter how praiseworthy — she declined to repeat the same successful formula. She always tried to surpass herself, to innovate in techniques and to attune her work to new situations. Each text of her six creative works surprises its readers with a new twist and a different strategy. There were long periods when she did not publish, and yet she wrote and conceived works during such times. She would never allow a work of hers to see the public light until she was completely satisfied with it. She was not prolific as a *romancier*, but she was a perfectionist. What she cared about was the quality, not the quantity, the creative breakthrough, not the cumulative record. Her readers felt confident that each new work was not going to be a reworking and reshaping of earlier motifs, though we all knew that she had constant concerns which surfaced in different configurations in her corpus. One senses that she wrote when

the creative drives welled in her and had to flow out. She was not a woman to sit at her desk in order to concoct a book, nor would she be content with the spontaneous overflow of emotions. Her intimate contacts with the roots of human issues, her moral uprightness, her scrupulous inclinations and her passion for the just and beautiful guaranteed that any work she authored would be a literary event.

In her magnum opus, *Al-Bab Al-Mafhuk* (The Open Door), 1960, reprinted 1989, a majestic narrative structure brings together the story of a young middle-class girl's coming of age against the backdrop of the monumental historical events that shook Egypt in the 1940s and the 1950s. Latifa Al-Zayyat weaves the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of formation, with the political events so artistically that it can be compared to Gustave Flaubert's *L'Education sentimentale*. In contrast to Flaubert, however, her novel portrays how one overcomes the pitfalls of a sentimental education and gains mature and progressive consciousness. To my mind this novel is a modern Arabic classic focusing on the intellectual and emotional growth of a woman protagonist. This novel has not become part of the Arabic literary canon attests to the shortsightedness of academic institutions, and the fact that it has not been translated to English (or French) reflects the politics of translation.

Latifa Al-Zayyat's *Al-Shaykh al-Hakim* (Old Age), 1986, though presented as a collection of short stories, reads as a series of intelligently constructed fragments in a novelistic work. The labyrinthine order, the postmodern intertwining and the loose unity leave the burden of structuring the whole on the reader. This is another indication of the author's aversity to imposing her hegemony. The middle-aged protagonist — with her disillusionments, wrecked life and yet still possessing glimmers of hope — reflect a realistic portrait of a woman and the complexity of narrative in the 1980s. Like James Joyce's *Dubliners*, it is written to depict scrupulously the state of mind of the protagonists, and by extension the mood of a city and a period.

In her autobiography, *Hamla Taftish: Awraq Shakhsyya* 1992 (The Search: Personal Papers, 1996), now available in English, French, German and Italian translations, Latifa Al-Zayyat concentrates on episodes in her life that start with her childhood and end with her imprisonment — along with hundreds of Egypt's intelligentsia — in the fall of 1981. The title of the autobiography is drawn from the incident of the security search for personal papers of the inmates. Latifa Al-Zayyat portrays herself at the end of her autobiographical account as wounded but not broken, still carrying within her the fervor of the child with whom the narrative opens. She explores her relation to her first husband, a political activist, and more extensively her relation to her second husband, a professor of English literature and a critic who seemed the antithesis to everything Latifa Al-Zayyat stood for. Her eventual break with him is presented without self-pity and with a liberating awareness that this phase in her life was a temporary digression.

In her subsequent works, whether her play, *Bay' wa-shira* (Buying and Selling), 1994, or her novella, *Sahib al-bay* (The Owner of the House), 1994, Latifa Al-Zayyat foregrounds female sensibility in a Third World context. Torn between the trappings of an imposed image of a feminist ideal and the desire for self-fulfilment and the attainment of personhood, the woman remains at conflicting crossroads. When dependency is glorified as femininity and a mind of one's own is seen as counter-feminine, the woman has to sacrifice either her womanhood or personhood. Latifa Al-Zayyat depicts, with her brilliant literary strokes, this dilemma and the wavering her protagonists undergo. The



legitimate claims act like "a pair of pincers", to borrow the expression of Simone Weil, and the only way out of the contradiction — as the works suggest — is not to repress one at the expense of the other, but to go beyond. Liberation cannot be individual; or rather, individual liberation requires communal liberation. False ideals of gender are produced by false consciousness which in itself is the epiphenomenon of socio-economic organisation based on control, manipulation and exploitation.

Latifa Al-Zayyat in her triple discourse, creative, critical and political, sought to heal the maimed human condition surrounding her. She wanted men and women to live abundantly, to break the boundaries separating atomised individuals, to create *communitas*, a joyful merging in a collectivity. However, the current she swam against was at times too powerful. Simple innocent evils continued to be ground down and victimised. She had the lucidity to see the debasement and the will to confront it. In her last work, a collection of short stories, she uses irony and magic realism to depict the horror show that everyday life has become for the average citizen. Incarcerated for no reason that he can discern, the protagonist, in *Al-Rajul alladhi 'arifa tuhmatahu* (The Man who Knew his Charge), 1995, searches his mind to see what he could have said or done that brought upon him detention. In this Kafkaesque exercise, the agonies and humiliations of an ordinary citizen are presented. The surrealist saga of the character satirizes bureaucratic and despotic regimes. The satirisation makes us laugh, thus liberating us from the fear of power. Laughter, here, becomes a weapon of resistance.

May the memory of this remarkable woman remain alive!

The writer is professor of comparative literature at the American University in Cairo

Extracts from Latifa Al-Zayyat's *Hamla Taftish: Awraq Shakhsyya* (The Search: Personal Papers), Cairo: Dar Al-Hilal, 1992

When at the age of seven I went up to that room on the roof, I saw for the first time in my life a student at the faculty of arts and a distinguished poet, El-Hamshari. It was a unique experience, and had a finality to it. Perhaps what later rendered the experience inaccessible to me was my loss of innocence due to the exposure to evil, both directly and indirectly. The experience, perhaps unattainable in reality, was informed by my indefatigable desire for the absolute, for the absolutes of beauty, of truth and of the good (but is it for the absolute that I yearn or is my yearning for a return to the womb — the absolute being the twin of death?).

For hours on end, restless and incapable of settling for long in one position as I am, I would sit cross-legged and square-armed like a statue of Buddha, watching that handsome 20-year-old poet as one would watch the sun with eyes blinded most of the time by the radiant light.

He would be sitting, long legs outstretched, in his apricot-coloured chair in the room or on his straw chair under the jasmine trellis on the roof, wearing his light grey trousers and navy blue blazer with gold buttons, reading a book, jotting down words in his copybook or lost in thought...

It did not matter to me in the least whether he spoke to me or not, noticed my presence or not... What I was contemplating was not a beautiful man nor even a beautiful person. I was contemplating beauty in its absolute, perfection in its absolute. In a unique moment, when the contemplation culminated in the loss of myself, in my extinction, my death, I attained oneness with beauty in the absolute, with perfection in the absolute, and broke free of the shackles of the body and the relativity of time and place.

That was an experience never accessible to me with any other person, though I realise now that in all my life I have been seeking to fulfil it. The great love, to me, corresponded to the desire to achieve oneness with an absolute. It corresponded to the fervent yearning to be lost in the other, to exist through the other, to lose the self, the identity of the self, and to break free from the body enfolding the self, in oneness with the other... My quest for imposing permanency on human relations characterised by change was a mad quest for imposing the absolute on a world governed by relativity.

I realise now that throughout my life I have sought the absolute, and that the absolute is the twin of death. For there is neither perpetuity nor permanence in a world characterised by constant change. I realise now that my love was a loss of oneself in the other, and that my crime is unforgivable because I willed that. No crime can be greater than that of burying oneself alive. My hands are besmeared with my own blood.

I attained union with the absolute in two different periods of my life and in two places as different from each other as day and night, as beauty and ugliness. In St Mark's Square in Venice at sunset I attained oneness with beauty, and in the darkness of the well in our old house I became one with death.

At the gate of the women's prison in Qanater there are two ancient trees, each more than a hundred years old. A third tree stands in the centre of the inner courtyard of the prison. Had it not been that I waited long at the gate of the prison I would not have noticed the two outer trees. As for the tree that stands in the centre of our prison, it cannot escape the eye of any inmate, even if she never gets the opportunity to draw near it, even if iron bars separate her from the tree. Perhaps because in prison you watch the tree from afar, beyond iron bars, you suddenly realise why this particular tree and not any other appealed so to the imagination of the painter Inji Aftonaw who, in her five years of detention at the Qanater Prison, produced out of it 16 paintings. The distance and the bars reinforce your consciousness of its persistent beckoning.

The roots of the tree in our prison extend every day into the depths of the earth, encroaching every day into more earth. The tree of our prison rises above all walls. Having watched the tree from behind the bars for two months, I know today that its roots have reached to the point where I stand, to where I sleep in the ward, which before the detention order housed women beggars. The roots of the tree in our prison strike deep. The earth narrows them out, rejects them. The roots of the tree coil on the face of the ground, multiplying, rejuvenating and twisting, exhilarated by the surface. They cut into the earth, new roots merging with old, penetrating deeper into the earth whenever rejected by the earth.

On a moonlit night, as I watched the tree from behind a gate of close iron railings, listening attentively, I could have sworn that I was hearing from after the flow of sap from roots to branches to red flowers, though I was not sure if I heard was the flow of sap in the tree or the flow of blood in my veins. The instant shook me and the beating of my heart rose above all other sounds.

Translated by Hala Halim

Plain Talk

It was a real feast for the eyes to watch the Alvin Ailey's American dance theatre at the Opera House the other day. There is no doubt that the great hall was the right place for such a superb performance, equal to any classical or modern dance troupes I have seen.

The troupe was founded by Ailey in 1958 with the intent of expressing the black cultural tradition. Watching the performance, my thoughts could not but turn back to 1956 when I attended a congress in Paris about what was called — in those pre-political correctness times (and, incidentally, what is the correct term these days) — "Negro Culture". It was a great occasion. Indeed, such was the success of the event that it was followed later by the Second Congress in Rome. Both congresses attempted to formulate definitions of what constitutes black culture. They came up with a number of conclusions that helped shape the future of that culture.

Participants in the two congresses came from Africa, North America, Latin America as well as the West Indies — their backgrounds reflecting the richness and diversity of the culture we were to discuss. I still remember the key-note address, given by distinguished Senegalese writer Alioune Diop, in which he defined the objective and parameters of the event. He called upon "Negroes of culture to combine their efforts, so that they may, together, take their place in the full flood of their people's historic destiny".

Diop called for a fellowship with other peoples of the earth to help enrich mankind's inheritance with all the positive and beneficial contributions that "our experience, our judgment and our sensitivity can rightfully make". His was a great message, devoid of any note of inferiority or arrogance. To the same modest vein, Diop, who incidentally visited Egypt a number of times through the Afro-Asian Writers' Union, ascertained that "Western contributions to the formation of our personality remain precious". His plea was merely that the enrichment be a two-way, mutually beneficial one.

Watching the Alvin Ailey dancers, under the leadership of their artistic director Judith Jamison, those words seemed to have come to fruition. I am not an expert, but to me, it was quite clear that Africa was present in every step, every gesture. Rhythm is the distinguishing character of African music, endowing it with vitality and life-force. The drum, in this performance, was of the essence — the element that lent distinction to the beat and movements. Whether on African soil or away from it, there can be no doubt that Africans are great lovers of rhythm.

But to place too great an emphasis on rhythm in and of itself would be to underestimate the passion and devotion vested by the dancers in the interpretation of the music. Devotion is indeed the right word here. For the performance looked more like a ritual. The intensity of the footwork, the magic of the music and the almost religious devotion of the dancers made for a performance of great, almost mystical, force. It certainly was a performance that will long be remembered.

Mursi Saad El-Din

The stuff of experience

Ibrahim Fathi reviews Latifa Al-Zayyat: *Al-Adab wal-Watan* (Literature and the Homeland), a compilation of writings from a conference, convened in 1995, in honour of the writer

The relationship between literature and politics — pivotal to Latifa Al-Zayyat's political activism and prolific literary output — forms the subject of *Al-Adab wal-Watan* (Literature and the Homeland), a volume devoted to the writer who, throughout her life, searched continually for new formulae for the relationship between writing and politics be it through the general, theoretical dimension or as applied in literature and criticism.

Certainly it comes as no surprise to find scholars, in this volume, tracing connections between Al-Zayyat's role in pioneering women's activism in the late 1940s and her literary output in the 1960s. Nor is it surprising that they should see the self projected so intensely by Latifa Al-Zayyat in works like *Al-Shaykh al-Hakim* (Old Age) and *Hamla Taftish: Awraq Shakhsyya* (The Search: Personal Papers) as being distinct from the introverted or from solipsistic, though Al-Zayyat was herself always keenly aware of the tensions and inconsistencies at work in her position, aware that her own freedom was intimately related to the collective struggle for freedom.

The social reality in which Latifa Al-Zayyat's "self" performs a free action or an action she hopes is free is — as she says — proscribed by a multitude of dictates, economic, political, behavioural, moral and traditional. Such dictates are capable of depriving the individual of the power to act freely, through intimidation and coercion, through deprivation and imprisonment. Thus, no action can attain its meaning except through the dynamic interaction between the individual self and reality. Certain works by Latifa Al-Zayyat, the critics argue, throw into relief the dialectical relationship between necessity and freedom in the formation of her character. Necessity is dictated by the father, the family, by social class, teachers, the ruler. Necessity is therefore a legacy and an actuality. Freedom, on the other hand, is acquired, in spite of the many aspects of necessity.

Under the title of *Al-Katib Wal-Hurriyya* (The Writer and Freedom), Latifa Al-Zayyat explains how her position as a woman in a patriarchal, class-ridden society multiplied the shackles of necessity

and imposed limitations on free action. Society instructs its daughters to cancel the self — women's voice and her ability to act freely — in favour of the other, namely the man. Latifa Al-Zayyat, through her self-awareness, offers insights into the pattern of the oppressed mother who oppresses her daughter so that she will be accepted by an oppressive society that wants only an oppressed woman.

Al-Zayyat writes: "My mother taught me not to act, not to speak, not to voice. Invariably she confiscated my voice before I could raise it, blessed my passivity, taught me how to smile, how to bleed. She turned me and clipped my nails. My mother taught me to annihilate myself in the beloved so that I might be, or rather that I might cease to be. I learned, among other things, to suppress myself. It took a long time for me to free myself of my oppressive education."

Early on, Latifa set herself the task of recreating her free self in face of all the accepted wisdom about a woman's role in a patriarchal society in turn oppressed by colonialism and a reactionary monarchy. She fashioned her liberated personality through a democratic nationalist movement aimed at liberating society. In addition to direct popular political activism, writing constituted, for Latifa, a free act, as well as a means to reinvent herself and her society.

The freedom afforded by the creative process, in her opinion, is unique, paralleled only by the freedom she experienced in revolutionary public acts. For both creativity and public action engage one's full national faculties and emotional capacities. Political work, in this sense, is a form of artistic creativity — a theme on which the contributors to this par-

ticular volume modulate.

In Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's opinion, Latifa Al-Zayyat's novel *Al-Bab Al-Mafhuk* (The Open Door) surpasses the body of women's writing about man as both the loved and the oppressor. For him, the essence of Al-Zayyat's political struggle is that absolute beauty lies in coexisting with grand concepts, not least those of the homeland and its independence.

For Said El-Kafrawi Al-Zayyat writes in the confessional mode, expressing deep concern for the human condition while Nimat El-Beheri acknowledges that the present generation of women writers follows in Al-Zayyat's footsteps, continuing the quest for a redefinition of both the self and reality. Hala El-Badri views Latifa Al-Zayyat's *Personal Papers* as a narrative that unravels, through the author's experiences and others', the history of the nationalist movement in Egypt and people's relationship vis-à-vis power and subjugation.

In the parts of the book that focus on theory we find echoes from Al-Zayyat's critical writings, revolving around the dialectics of the literary and the political.

In his paper, Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti identifies the dangers inherent in assuming for the individual the image of a superman with a shelf for political issues, one for women, another for economics etc. Do concrete commitments separate between that part of us that walks in the street, that loves, hates etc? The writer who subjects attitudes to questioning, who conveys the stream in a whisper survives the traditionalism of both the right and the left.

as did Latifa Al-Zayyat.

In the section headed "Latifa Al-Zayyat and the Politics of Writing", Lebanese novelist Elias Khouri insists that Latifa Al-Zayyat's literary works, while laying bare our reality before us, do not present any preconceived answers but rather constitute a search or quest. Hence the generic progression and innovation within the corpus of her work — an effort to free the literary text from cliché.

Critic Amna Rachid charts Al-Zayyat's itinerary from the gauging of the depths of the human soul to a forecasting of future promise while tracing the various narrative techniques Al-Zayyat employed in diaries, memoirs and novels.

The prison — as an omnipresent leitmotif in Latifa Al-Zayyat's work — forms the core of Radwa Ashour's paper. In Al-Zayyat's texts, writes Ashour, there is always imprisonment, be it physical detention or a psychological, symbolic jailing. Indeed, the two kinds of imprisonment may merge and reinforce one another, or they may be antithetical; the psychological imprisonment of illusion and inability to act can negate the will of a free person while the most inhuman prison conditions can be overcome by a detainee's awareness and commitment. In Al-Zayyat's exploration of the freedom-imprisonment dichotomy, Ashour argues, the fundamental importance of facing up to things is extolled as opposed to submission; free will is vindicated as the only alternative to self-imprisonment.

In a similar vein Fawziya Mahran analyses the leitmotif of doors — open doors, closed doors, doors ajar; literal doors or metaphorical. The door is at

once a partition between two incompatible worlds and the threshold of a new horizon. It can be a crossing into redemption or perdition. There is the door of the prison and there is that of national commitment, though any door, in the end, can be no more than a corridor or crossing-over.

One of the interesting studies included in this volume is Samia Mehrez' "Writing the Homeland" which deals with the relationship between narration and the homeland. Mehrez argues that the homeland is no longer a material reality parallel to the narrative but an imaginary discourse created by the writer of fiction within the narrative. Thus Arab fiction has its role in contributing to representations of an imagined national identity. Mehrez elaborates the important role played by Zayyat in writing as well as imagining the homeland which assumes many faces in her work — the present/absent, the collecting/dispersing, the fair/oppressive, the dream/nightmare.

Interestingly, the volume also contains several readings of a single text, namely *Awraq Shakhsyya* (Personal Papers), by a number of prominent critics — Mahmoud El-Alim, Faisal Darraj, Sabri Hafez and Yassin El-Shaybani, while Ferial Ghazoui contributes a study of "The Man Who Knew His Charge".

Whatever aspect of Latifa Al-Zayyat's work is critically spotlighted, however, a single theme emerges — the dialectical relationship between Al-Zayyat's intellectual, aesthetic and political creativity. Latifa Al-Zayyat's practice was characterised by singular features — dedication to the living experience without falsification, the articulation of the specificity of the lived without contriving spontaneity. In Zayyat's work, experience is always subject to discussion and questioning. And as a consequence the current volume, ably edited by Sayed El-Bahrani, makes a valuable contribution to the on-going dialogue about Arab literature and Arab lives.

Al-Adab wal-Watan (Literature and the Homeland), ed. Sayed El-Bahrani, Cairo: Nur and Markaz Al-Bithoun Al-Arabi, 1996

As the press and the public were venting their anger at the Olympic team for failing to get a single medal in the Atlanta Olympics, another national team, which few had ever heard about, was in Atlanta, breaking world records. In the Paralympic games, Egypt's disabled forced themselves on the country's attention; their triumph not the result of backing, care and sponsorship but in spite of the lack of it. And this seems to sum up the situation of the disabled in the country — everyday life is a tremendous battle. *Al-Ahram Weekly* looks at the relentless efforts of those who would even out the odds

The odds

A special one of us

Rehabilitation is no longer synonymous with institutionalisation as Mariz Tadros finds out

Umm Emad used to run around the room, hysterical, tightly hugging her blue-faced, frozen son. "Every time he got these fits, I thought he was going to pass away. I was constantly weeping," said Umm Emad. She did not realise that her son was epileptic and mentally retarded until she brought him for a check-up two years ago at the Integrated Care Society's Childhood Disability Project in Ain Helwan.

Initially, this diagnosis seemed to confirm her worst fears that he was going to live the rest of his life as a burden, with no worthwhile future. Since she has been coming to Ain Helwan, however, her attitude towards her son has radically changed. Emad will be starting primary school this autumn — after having spent endless hours learning basic skills with his trained community worker and his newly trained mother.

This is a far cry from the days when Umm Emad used to go from one doctor to another, desperate to find a cure for her sick child. "The doctors used to treat the diarrhoea and vomiting and ignore the fits and the mental retardation. I used to tell them about it and it was as if I hadn't said a thing."

The Ain Helwan project is not a private, exclusive care facility aimed at serving privileged children, whose families can afford the cost of its services. According to Dr Ali Sadek, the project's secretary general, the Ain Helwan centre was established in 1994 under the auspices of Mrs Suzanne Mubarak's National Integrated Care Society project. Mrs Mubarak's commitment to the improvement of children's quality of life led to a new interest in the rights of children with special needs in Egypt, Sadek explained.

In her capacity as chairperson of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak assigned a task force in the late eighties to look into the needs of disabled children representing governmental, non-governmental and private organisations. Aida Guindi, board member of the Integrated Care Society and a former regional director of UNICEF for Europe and East Africa, was asked to chair the task force. "It was the year of the disabled when Mrs Suzanne Mubarak was given a reward for her contribution to children at large by Rehabilitation International," Guindi recalled.

She adds, "It was clear, however, that Mrs Suzanne Mubarak had a vision of her own." She initiated a National Task Force of Childhood Disability. A three-year plan was drawn up for early intervention, prevention and rehabilitation of disabled children.

A year later, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak assigned her own task force to design a centre for the assessment and referral of disabled children and parental guidance. In 1993, Egypt's only comprehensive assessment centre was established in the north Cairo district of Zeitoun and inaugurated by Mrs Mubarak. This centre deals with disabled children in a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary approach that seeks to identify, treat and rehabilitate children with diverse and multiple disabilities. It also strives to raise awareness of the preventability of disability within the community.

Simultaneously the National Task force drew up a strategy and plan of operation from which the Ain Helwan Childhood Disability Project came out as a pilot project, to be duplicated and extended in the future. The Ain Helwan project, which now caters to nearly 200 disabled children, was set up in 1994.

Ain Helwan is a joint project between UNICEF and the Integrated Care Society and was also provided with technical assistance by ARED (Association for Health and Environment Development). Alaa Shukrallah, consultant for UNICEF, pointed out that the Ain Helwan project was modelled according to "the revolutionary concept of community-based rehabilitation (CBR)". According to UNICEF, community-based rehabilitation "encourages, utilises and builds on local resources that include communities, families and the disabled persons themselves."

Practically, it means that rehabilitation should not be synonymous with institutionalisation. Neither should the treatment of children with special

needs be limited to specialised medical care. Using the comprehensive integrated model, 80 per cent of the resources are invested in community facilities such as primary health care centres and community-based rehabilitation centres. The remaining 20 per cent of the resources go into professional specialised treatment centres, the linking factor between the two being an assessment centre.

Accordingly, the Integrated Care Society at Ain Helwan aims to integrate the child back into the community with the help of the community itself. Community members are recruited and trained to identify, detect and address cases of disability in their community at an early stage.

Shukrallah asserted that one cannot fight disability without fighting underdevelopment. This requires special attention being paid to the fundamental problems obstructing the provision of adequate care for a child with special needs, such as poverty, housing problems and large families.

For example, a community trainer in Ain Helwan emphasised that the centre on its own can do nothing without the cooperation of the child's guardian, which is usually the mother. However, if the mother is in Ragaa's position, with six children, including Neveen who is epileptic, and a husband at home with a heart condition, how can she afford the time, energy or money to cater to Neveen's special needs? Setting up small income generating projects is one way being adopted by the Integrated Care Society in Ain Helwan to break the vicious cycle of poverty and disability.

Admittedly, for an integrative project to work, it must be linked to other national institutions and facilities which are accessible and able to provide adequate care. This is particularly the case if its objective of raising awareness within the community about the nature and prevention of disability is to be achieved.

Yet the needs of the disabled continue to be disregarded, even though the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 10 per cent of the population in any country is disabled. According to a survey conducted by the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) in the governorates of Giza, Kafu, El-Shaikh and Aswan, seven per cent of the Egyptian population is disabled. The discrepancy between the two figures, explained Hoda El-Tahawi, head of Disability Abolishing Group at NCCM, lies in the definition given to the word disabled. While the WHO definition includes organic diseases such as heart and kidney



Music lights up the lives of the 500 young women who are members of the Al-Nur wa Al-Amal (Light and Hope) centre's orchestra, conducted by Ahmed Abul-Eid (left). Established in 1958, the centre has received numerous international honours and has branches all over Egypt

problems, NCCM's survey was restricted to the disabilities affecting the daily activities of individuals. These are visual impairment, blindness, hearing impairment, deafness, motor disability, speech impairment, dumbness, mental retardation, epilepsy and any combination of these. The percentage of severe disability ranged between two and four, while mild and moderate disabilities accounted for roughly 75 per cent and 10 per cent respectively of the total disabled population.

The incidence of disability is greater in the countryside than in urban centers, "although most of the disabilities could be easily prevented," said El-Tahawi. Infectious diseases continue to be a major

cause of disability, despite the fact that they would be easily avoided if immunisation programmes were rigorously implemented. Malnutrition of mothers and babies also accounts for a high percentage of mentally retarded children in Egypt, as well as worldwide. UNICEF estimates that 250,000 children lose their vision every year from lack of Vitamin A and 20 million suffer from mental retardation related to iodine deficiency.

"Many more birth defects and lifelong handicaps could be alleviated if women received antenatal, perinatal and post-natal care. For instance, during delivery, the child may be pulled in the wrong way, or he may suffer from asphyxia," said El-Tahawi.

Furthermore, 90 per cent of the disabilities that are mild to moderate, if caught early, can be treated with a minimum of resources. "We have to be on the look-out for the warning signs of delays in children's development. We cannot wait until the condition is quite advanced before we act. For example, a child who is born with phenylketonuria (an inborn malfunction in the child's metabolism) turns his mother's milk into poison. This results in severe mental retardation, hyperactivity and epilepsy but can be prevented if a special milk formula is given instead," explained Shukrallah.

Yet according to Safia Magdi, professor of Clinical Psychology at Cairo University, there are gaps at all levels in the governmental services for the disabled. Generally, the Ministry of Health is responsible for prevention, detection and medical treatment mostly through its centres for motherhood and childhood, health units and hospitals. The Ministry of Education is responsible for special education and training, and the Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for the rehabilitation of people with special needs into the community through its social rehabilitation offices, outwards and sheltered factories, which provide work opportunities for about 142 people. "Only 10 per cent of disabled people are catered to, because there are not enough facilities, and the ones existing are not up to standard," said Magdi.

This is due to the state of fragmentation of the services available. Dr

Rawia Mustafa, supervisor of the child health unit at the maternal and child health programme at the Ministry of Health, admitted that doctors are often unaware of existing facilities for children whose needs extend beyond medical help. This means that parents cannot take advantage of available facilities, or do so too late.

According to Magdi, attitudes have changed but not enough. "People used to address disability from the point of view of charity. They felt that the disabled are worthy of our pity and help, but then they started looking at them from a medical viewpoint. Once that fails, the service will become once again charity." Both approaches are very limited, said Magdi, insisting that unless the rights of the disabled are recognised as human rights, not concessions, little progress will occur.

Practically, it means that the disabled have the right to participate in public life like any other citizen. Participation is synonymous with integration, and in this area, Magdi believes, there has been considerable progress made under the direction of Mrs Mubarak. "Mrs Mubarak suggested that every school should have special classes for disabled children. This would be excellent. Unfortunately up until now, this did not materialize."

Public reluctance to recognise and implement the rights of the disabled as citizens is strong. Magdi pointed out that according to the law, disabled people have a five per cent quota for employment.

Guindi said, "Even when it is, employers have ways of getting around it. For example, they employ someone with a very minor disability, like a limp. Or, they employ them, give them their salary and ask them not to come to work. Disabled people must have the right to feel and sense their accomplishments, like everybody else. They work very hard and they are productive, their achievements should be recognised publicly like everybody else's."

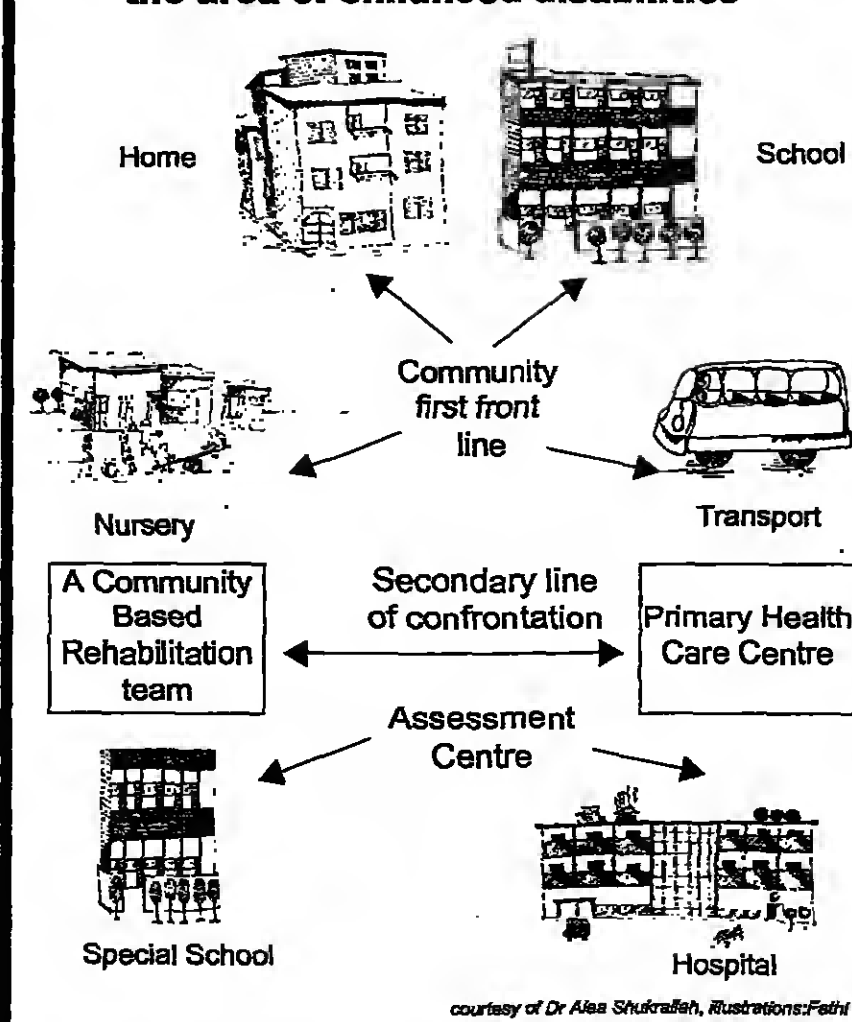
The media has done little to change this view of the disabled. "Its tone is either patronising or one of ridicule," she said. Instead, asserts Magdi, the media should be involved in a general campaign for disability awareness. For instance, it should educate the public on the hazards of intermarriage, which causes 20 per cent of the cases of disability in children.

Article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by 176 countries, including Egypt, stipulates that, "State Parties recognise that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community." This has yet to be seen at the national level.



Children's day at the Ain Helwan centre

A comprehensive integrated model in the area of childhood disabilities



courtesy of Dr Alaa Shukrallah, Illustrations: Fahd

Strictly SETI

Train the parent to train the child, an affordable programme for children with mental disabilities, reports Mariz Tadros

Half a dozen pre-schoolers are singing, laughing and holding hands for a ring-around-the-rosey game led by two trainers. This could be any kindergarten, except for the one-way mirror revealing to the parents in an adjoining room what their children are doing. Welcome to SETI's pre-school for mentally retarded children. Special Education and Training Integration Unit, SETI, is a non-profit organization set up by CARITAS to enhance the life quality of children with special needs from the day they are born until they reach adulthood.

However, unlike many traditional institutions catering for children with special needs, "instead of putting all the weight on the education of the child, we concentrate on the training of parents, teachers and community workers," explained Naguib Khourzan, director of SETI's Cairo Centre and professor of Educational Psychology at Ain Shams University.

Why the parents? Twenty-year-old Salwa Mohamed, mother of 4-year-old Hadeer, can explain. "When Hadeer was born and diagnosed with Down Syndrome, my husband and I were totally devastated... neither of us had any history of disability in our families and she was my first child. We both felt Hadeer was odd, that she was a singular, hopeless case. We didn't know how to cope with it." Four years after Hadeer's birth, Salwa arrived at SETI in tears, not knowing how to cope with her child. "They told me my child is different but also like any other child, that she needs to be treated with love and patience," said Mohamed.

As Mohamed embarked on the training course to help her identify and interact with Hadeer, the emotional rift between herself and her husband, "I just didn't know how to relate to her, often I could not figure out what she wanted, she kept on doing things in the wrong way and I kept on getting mad at her. Janet and Dallal

(the trainers) taught me how to treat her, how to get her to do something, how to teach her new skills."

Equally important is the opportunity given to both Mohamed and Hadeer to interact with others like them. For Mohamed, it was the reassurance of knowing that she is not alone, that there are other parents with whom she can discuss the special as well as ordinary needs of her child.

As for Hadeer, "before, she used to bite and pull other children's hair, she didn't know how to relate to them. Now, she is mingling quite well with the children in her class". Once Mohamed finishes her training session, she will be given a certificate to qualify her for training her daughter, as well as other mothers. Not only does Mohamed intend to pursue her training after her daughter transfers out of SETI and to a special school, but she is also considering having another child — a possibility that she never considered after she first had Hadeer.

According to Janet Samir, head of the family training unit, 75 per cent of the training is concentrated on the parent, and the rest on the child because it is the parent who has to be able to train the child on a long-term basis. That way the family can be independent in dealing with the special needs of their child. "There is

no point in us giving two three-hour sessions a week if the child forgets everything by the time he gets home. We are here to pass on techniques to parents who can in turn apply them at home... For instance, we teach the child one colour here and the parent picks up the technique and applies it at home to teach the child all the other colours. The results are faster and the parent becomes the key player in the progress of the child's development."

At the end of the 8-month training period, the parent, after passing a little test, is given a certificate saying she is fit to train her child and other children with special needs. "Say we train eight families and each family sets up its own group of say 10 families from its neighbourhood, that way we have helped 80 families..."

Rights now!

'Save the handicapped', says El-Tanany, renowned artist and disabled rights' lobbyist

When I first entered Fatma El-Tanany's workshop, "Atelier 87", at the World Trade Centre, I was transfixed by the intricately colourful work. Stained-glass interlaced with raw black metal was shaped into beautiful lamp stands, frames and windows.

An architect by profession, El-Tanany is more renowned for her artistic work for which she has received numerous awards and prizes. El-Tanany walks with a slight limp, leaning on her stick for support. She was born with a hip dislocation and a muscle defect from her knee downwards and has been involved in a relentless struggle championing the rights of the disabled in Egypt.

After decades of activism, she has no optimistic reports on the required facilities. "There are none, absolutely none," she laments. "It is not surprising that you do not see many handicapped people on the streets of Cairo; they are all stuck at home," she sighed.

"No ramps in public places. No ramps in governmental places. No ramps in cinemas or theatres. No ramps in schools. No ramps in universities. No ramps in mosques or churches. No ramps in shopping malls. Nothing, nothing," she continued.

"I cannot climb the pavement, it is 50 centimetres high. I don't even think any ordinary person can climb it," she said. Yet two ramps, one at the beginning and one at the end of the street would solve this problem. "It's easier for me because I walk with a stick, my handicap is not that severe. But when I see this pavement, I panic. Crossing the street is also a problem. Someone with a

hearing problem cannot hear a car coming," she explained.

If using public transportation is hectic for an ordinary person, it is almost forbidding for a disabled person, she added. For instance, "in the metro they don't have any lifts, so it is out of bounds for a disabled person in a wheelchair. But they promised that there will be lifts in the newly-built stations." El-Tanany suggests that four buses be especially equipped for the disabled. These would depart from Tahrir Square in the centre of Cairo to various locations. This would be no great expense for the government, she argued.

The only place properly tailored for the needs of the disabled is the Opera House because it was built according to the Japanese building code. In contrast, the Egyptian building code does not have clauses regarding features for the disabled. El-Tanany was told that this would change in the new building code, yet so far there is no indication of improvement.

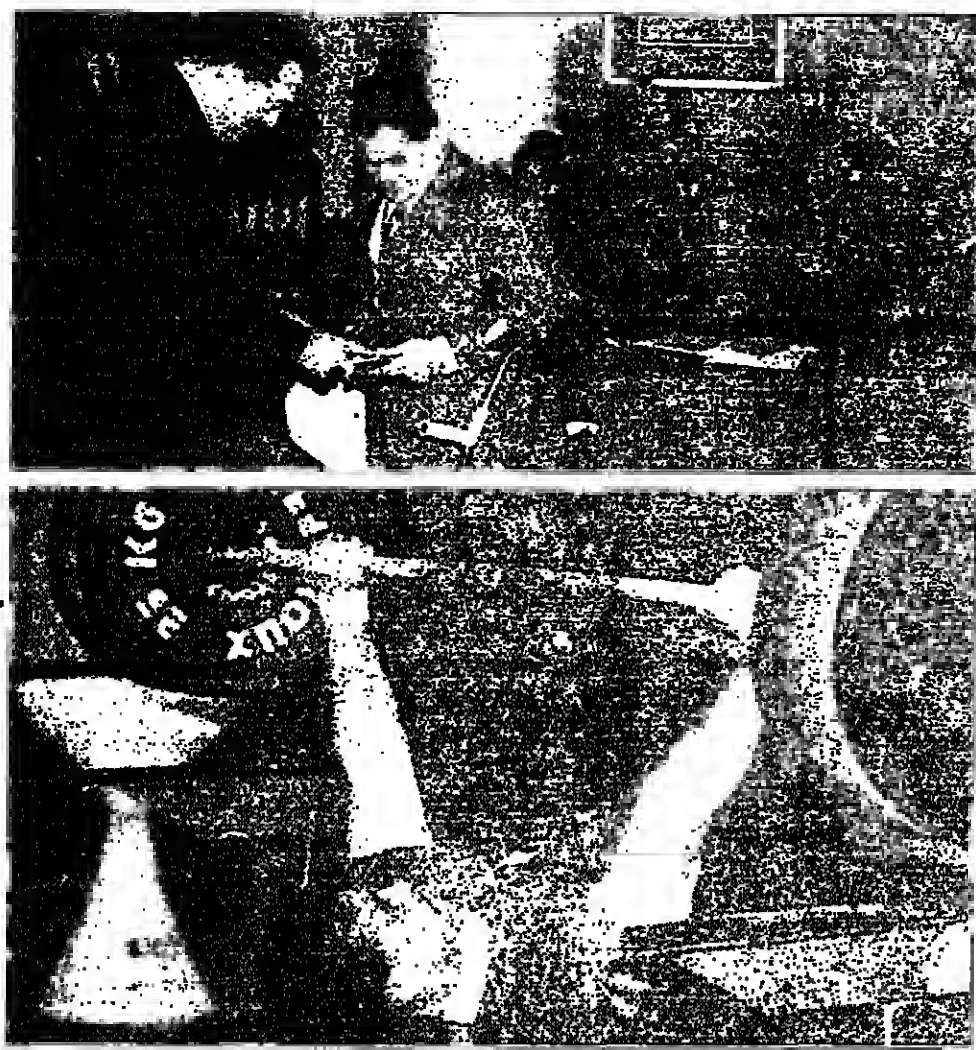
A particularly sensitive problem for the disabled are the public toilets. El-Tanany relates, "A friend of mine who is wheelchair-bound once went to a five-star hotel for a wedding. At one point, she needed to go to the toilet but there was none available for the handicapped. She had to have three or four people helping her in there. Can you imagine the humiliation and embarrassment?"

The lack of appropriate facilities is not due to the fact that Egypt is a developing country. Rather, it is because the general public does not care.

... and their eveners

Getting the gold

Fresh from their recent success in the 1996 Atlanta Paralympics, the Egyptian national disabled team returned home with more medals than their Olympic counterparts could have dreamed of — had they won even one. **Abeer Anwar** profiles seven of the eight gold medalists on the team



SYMBOLS OF SUCCESS: President Hosni Mubarak honours Ahmed Goma's with a merit award (top left) as other award recipients watch. Famous for breaking records, Ahmed Antar (right) brought home a gold and broke records at the Atlanta Paralympics. Egypt's disabled athletes have attracted international attention in sports such as weightlifting (bottom left)

No easy feat

At 19, Karima Zaki was the youngest member of the Egyptian team which went to the 1996 Atlanta Paralympics. She was, however, also able to win the first gold medal of the competition. Her 26.36 metre discus throw was enough for the gold and a new Paralympic record.

A native of Alexandria, as a young girl, Zaki turned to sports as a means of changing the way the people around perceived her. But the pay-off was even more than she had bargained for. "Before taking up sports, Karima was lonely and melancholy," recalled her elder brother, Fawaz. "She never wanted to go out. But after a few months of training, her personality began to change and she became more outgoing and cheerful."

Getting to that point, let alone winning a gold in the Paralympics, was no easy feat. Her parents, fearing the reaction of the neighbours to their daughter getting involved in sports, were less than amenable to the idea.

"I reluctantly agreed to her beginning training," said her father.

Once she began, however, there was no stopping Zaki. "At first, I practised with friends who were not disabled, mainly because I didn't know that there were competitions exclusively for disabled athletes," said Zaki. Her consistently strong performances caught the attention of her coach, Hisham Hamdi, who then encouraged her to participate in national discus throwing competitions. Motivated by Hamdi and her accomplishments, Zaki went on to win first place in the 1995 National Championships and, that same year, joined the national disabled team.

Along with her ever-increasing self-confidence, being a dedicated athlete has helped her with her disability. As a child, Zaki had fallen victim to infantile paralysis, an affliction which left her left leg five centimetres shorter than her right one.

"The training has helped narrow the difference in length between my legs to only 3 centimetres," she said.

Against the odds

Hailing from Alexandria, Mervat El-Sayed grew up in a poor family in the city's Karmouz district. From the start, El-Sayed faced an uphill battle, not only due to her disability and her family's poverty, but also because of the constraints of tradition. Her father, a conservative Upper Egyptian, was staunchly opposed to his daughter taking up sports and joining a club. However, her steadfast determination to not only excel but overcome all obstacles was pivotal in enabling her to prevail on her father to acquiesce and to garner a series of medals throughout her athletic career. During the Atlanta Paralympics, El-Sayed won a gold in the shot put, an event which she entered reluctantly, and a silver in the discus. At the competition, she also shattered the previous world record in the shot put.

"A key factor which served to sway my father's opinion was that Karima [Zaki], who was at the time my neighbour, would be training with me," said El-Sayed. "We are both very similar, even in the way we are disabled. She also has one leg shorter than the other."

Although she finally managed to get her father's approval to begin training seriously, El-Sayed harboured doubts that he would allow her to travel, should the opportunity arise. The opportunity came sooner than both of them had really anticipated. Her father, already impressed by her previous accomplishments, was thrilled with the news that his daughter had been chosen to represent Egypt in Atlanta. "He was particularly delighted when he saw me on television," she said. "And even criticism by members of the family about his decision to let me travel did not faze him. Now, he's the one who encourages me to practice and get ready for the Paralympics in Sydney in the year 2000."

Golden record

A 26-year-old hailing from the Sharqiya Governorate, Zakia Abdel-Rahman walked away from Atlanta with a gold medal and a new world record in the javelin. She also won the silver in the shot put, making her one of the three Egyptians who captured the first three spots in that event.

Still new to the world of sports, Abdel-Rahman began training at the age of 24, after watching her neighbour, and now teammate, Soheir El-Komi, practise despite her disability. In El-Komi, she found the source of inspiration she needed to get involved in sports. Training together, Abdel-Rahman began taking part in several competitions held in Cairo, but only if El-Komi was also taking part. Her family and neighbours, though poor, did their best to provide her with both the moral and material support she needed to excel. Abdel-Rahman was quick to convert this support into a collection of medals from various national and international championships, as well as a spot on the national team, which she joined last year.

"I love sports for the sake of sports — and the medals, of course," she joked. "Winning makes me feel that I am rendering my country a service. It also makes me feel like I'm not disabled."

Heroic strength

Known by his friends and family as Antar Ibn Shadad, a legendary Arab hero from the pre-Islamic period, the 27-year-old Ahmed Antar is famous for breaking records. Moreover, it's a reputation he is proud of, especially since he has broken a record in every competition he has entered. During the Atlanta Paralympics, his 13.91 metre shot put was enough to earn him a gold and set a new Paralympic record. He also won a bronze in the discus and another bronze in the javelin.

"In any competition, it is not enough for me to simply win the gold," said Antar. "I have to break a record." To aid him in reaching this goal, he trains with a shot put used by non-disabled athletes — one which is two kilograms heavier than those used by disabled athletes.

Another standard part of his training programme is his job. "Since the age of 14, I've worked as a smith in my father's workshop," he said. "The work was interesting, but more importantly, lifting all that iron and steel helped me build up my strength."

Antar joined the national team in 1994 after he was able to break the national record during his first national competition.

"I turned to sports because I felt there was no need to be ashamed of my disability," said Antar. "I wanted to show everyone how I could overcome it. In this way, I hoped that it would change people's attitude towards the disabled."

Will to succeed

As another one of the national team's shining stars during the Atlanta Paralympics, Ahmed Goma was able to shatter the previous Paralympic weightlifting record in the under-56kg category with a clear 12.5kg margin. Along with the new record, and the gold medal, he was given the nickname, the Egyptian Bobka. Bobka was a Ukrainian pole vaulter who also broke several world records. In the 1988 Paralympics in Seoul, Goma won the gold in the weightlifting competition and set a new world record. In 1990, he broke the world record in the World Championships held in France, and also set a new record in the 1991 World Championships.

Goma's introduction into the world of sports differs from that of his teammates. For the 28-year-old weightlifter, sports was something he took up, at the recommendation of his friends, to kill the boredom and loneliness he was feeling.

"I wanted to do something that was exciting and required strength, but which I would love — I chose weightlifting," he recalled. "The first time I went to practice with my club's team, the officials made fun of me, saying I wouldn't be able to lift the weights because my leg is paralysed." But instead of being daunted by their ridicule, Goma turned it into the driving force behind his will to succeed and to prove that age-old adage, mind over matter.

His success has attracted the attention of France's Handicapped Federation, but despite a lucrative offer, Goma refused to leave Egypt.

Miracle athlete

Sedki was the only Egyptian sprinter competing in the Paralympics. Setting a new Paralympic record in the event, he won the gold in the 400m and two bronze medals in the 100 and 200m sprints.

A 27-year-old oxy-acetylene welder from Alexandria, Sedki got involved with sports when he was 20, mainly as a result of his love for football, which he played constantly with his friends. Impressed by his speed, they encouraged him to begin a serious training programme. Almost half-heartedly, and not expecting too much, Sedki began his training and quickly found himself on the 1991 national handicapped team.

During the Barcelona Paralympics, Sedki was able to win the bronze medal, despite the fact that his leg was broken. His determination earned him the title "the miracle athlete."

In 1992, he set a new record in the 400m sprint in the World Championship in England.

Sedki explained that he prefers to train with non-disabled athletes. "Training with them gives me an incentive to do my best and try to beat them," he noted. "During the training, I forget about my disability and strive to challenge myself as much as I challenge them."

Stumbling on success

Like the rest of his teammates, Khairy was not only a medalist, but also a record breaker. During the Paralympics, he won the gold in the discus with a record-breaking 51.12m throw, and a silver in the javelin.

And, like his other teammates, Khairy stumbled on his success in a way that was somewhat accidental. One of the pioneers of handicapped athletics in Suez, where he lives, Khairy began training with two of his friends after hearing of the achievements realised by disabled Egyptian athletes in international competitions. When he first got involved in the field events, Khairy was a goalie on the Suez club's disabled handball team. However, his mounting interest in the javelin, shot put and discus events, coupled with his record-breaking performances in these events during several competitions, encouraged him to leave handball and pursue these events full-time.

During the Barcelona Paralympics in 1992, he set a new world record in the javelin, but strong competition from a Nigerian athlete cost him the gold during the Atlanta games. His record, however, still stands.

The truly motivating factor for Khairy during the Atlanta Paralympics was the arrogance of an Israeli competitor. The Israeli athlete told Khairy that he felt that winning the gold would be easy in the discus. Irrked, and more than a little irate by this statement, Khairy set out to make sure that the Israeli ate his words.

"I felt like I was going once again to fight in the October 1973 War, and I wanted to teach him a lesson," said the 27-year-old athlete. "I did."

Can we play too?

Although physically disabled athletes are allotted very limited funding for sports, and the mentally disabled fare even worse, **Gihan Shahine** finds out that a new day is dawning following Atlanta

Walid Soleiman, a 9-year-old mentally retarded child, happily rushes to catch up with his fellows in their every-other-day athletic classes. In a large stadium at the Al-Shams Club, a group of 20 mentally disabled members, children and adults, are gathered around their coach. In a circle, they repeat his movements, take turns leading the group, assist each other and applaud after every play. On the sidelines their parents watch, contented with the progress of their off-spring.

"Walid has improved significantly since he joined the sports classes about a month and a half ago," says Soheir Barakat, a housewife and Walid's mother. "Before this he lived in utter seclusion. Sports seem to have done wonders for him, he is much more sociable and less aggressive."

The "wonders", however, are limited to the few fortunate members of the Al-Shams Sporting Club. Al-Shams is the only sporting club nationwide that offers classes for the mentally disabled. "Before these classes began in 1992, our children had nowhere to go," says the father of a 27-year-old mentally disabled girl in the club.

Makarem Mahmoud, a member of Al-Shams and the mother of a disabled child, pioneered the idea of sports classes for the mentally disabled. From experiences with her own child, Mahmoud strongly believed that sports could help the mentally disabled, providing an outlet for their excess energy. She desperately tried to institute the idea in other sporting clubs, but without results. "The directors of most sporting clubs mocked the idea, considering it a stigma to have training for retarded children," Mahmoud said sadly.

"There is not a single club, decent public school or youth centre offering activities for the mentally retarded anywhere," complains Fadia Abdel-Rahman, an engineer and a mother of an 8-year-old disabled girl. "The mentally disabled, like any other citizen, are entitled to a decent life. They should at least have one sports centre where they can receive training from professionals," she continued.

Officials at the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports admit the council is not giving the mentally disabled proper attention. Budget, they claim, is the main impediment.

"The mentally disabled usually need special care and highly specialised coaches both of which are unavailable and very expensive," explained Samir Arafat, head of the Sports for All Department at the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports.

The physically disabled fare slightly better with regard to sports. They have become the focus of media, social and governmental attention, following the overwhelming success achieved by the national team in Atlanta this year.

Earlier this month, President Hosni Mubarak honoured the team, while the head of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, Abdel-Moneim Enara, suggested construction of an approximately LE5 million specialised sports facility for physically disabled athletes.

The disabled team members, however, claim this is the first time they have received any national attention, despite all their previous achievements in international sporting events. The reason, they suggest, is the failure of the national team in Atlanta this year.

The lack of awareness, most disabled athletes agree, translated into general apathy toward sports for the disabled. Despite the fact that there are 40 specialised clubs with a membership of 6,000 disabled nationwide, the Atlanta Paralympic athletes insist that these clubs are generally under-equipped to train a sports professional. High-quality equipment, professional coaches and facilities are severely lacking in most of these clubs.

Lack of funding seems to be the main problem for directors of the disabled-specialised clubs.

"Our annual budget is limited to LE3,000. This will not pay for the special equipment we need or the high salaries of professional coaches," maintains Salah Abdel-Salam, the secretary-general of a specialised club affiliated with the Institute of Poliomyelitis in Imbaba, a Cairo suburb.



Al-Shams Club's special sports class

Most of the 40 specialised clubs do not have their own premises. They occupy parts of youth centres which allot only about six to eight hours a week to training for the disabled. Almost all large sporting clubs do not have any classes for the disabled.

"This means we don't have a swimming pool to train disabled swimmers," complains Sherif Habib, a swimming coach. "I have four medal-winning disabled swimmers whose records I have to improve using the swimming pool of the Police Academy. Furthermore, like me, most people coaching the disabled have to use their common sense, as there exists no place in Egypt where we can get proper training in this field."

The Union for Disabled Athletes receives funding from the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, where officials insist they give as much as their budget will allow.

"The problem of funding is on its way to being solved," assures Arafat. The success of the national team for the disabled in Atlanta has motivated all official bodies to give the team and all disabled athletes more attention.

In addition to the new specialised sports centre for the disabled, the government is also considering upgrading already existing specialised clubs.

"More disabled people have decided to come out of seclusion. They show an interest in sports and many have come to enroll in our clubs," boasts Abdel-Salam. "Officials are happy to see this improvement and intend to increase our funding. It really seems a new day is dawning for the disabled."

A lonesome world

Negative attitudes towards the disabled are preventing many of them from leading the active lives they are capable of, as **Amany Abdel-Moneim** discovers

Official estimates place the number of disabled in Egypt at around five million, or around eight per cent of the population. According to World Health Organisation statistics, 10 per cent of the world's population are disabled.

Some of Egypt's disabled have been very successful in different fields. Others, particularly those from poor families, are deprived of their most basic rights and are denied a proper chance to be integrated into society. They want society to acknowledge their right to work instead of just pitying them, and demand access to better services and facilities.

"People should be more focused on integrating the disabled into society," said Nadia, 29, who was afflicted by polio when she was three years old. She believes that many people, whether they have good or bad intentions, hurt the feelings of disabled people. "When I try to get on a minibus in the middle of crowds, people try to help me. I often lose my balance and trip over, then fall on the street with a deep feeling of shame, anger and helplessness."

Nadia said. "I'd prefer to be on my own rather than people helping me with such a look of pity in their eyes."

What angers disabled persons most is the general public's insistence on isolating them. Shahira, 13, says, "I love music very much and one of my unfulfilled dreams is to sing in our school concerts. But our teacher would never choose a girl with a leg brace to be in the school choir."

Social misconceptions about the disabled and lack of public awareness about their needs and concerns were the main theme of a symposium held recently at the National Library. "We have to increase

people's awareness, which would help change the negative attitudes among policymakers, the disabled, their families and the public in general," said Yousry Abdel-Moneim, a professor of psychiatry at Cairo University. He argued that people should realise that disability is something natural which everyone must accept.

Unfortunately, many of the people who have to deal with the disabled are not professionally qualified. "They usually treat them oversympathetically or mock them. In my opinion both would drive the disabled to depression," said Latifa El-Garnal, a consultant at Behmen Hospital. "Increasing the knowledge and skills of service providers and professionals, in addition to developing better means of offering low-cost facilities to the poor, are needed," she added.

"I hate to be treated differently," said Salwa, 24, who was handicapped by polio and works as a clerk at Al-Mabarra Hospital. "I am used to acting normally and neglecting my disability. I even do all the domestic chores like any normal person."

"Disability never stopped me from becoming an African champion in athletics," said Samia Youssef, 32. She is an administrative specialist at Ain Shams University Hospital and a renowned athlete as well. Samia has won local tournaments, and she represented Egypt in the African Championships of 1991.

Female disabled persons often have to bear the brunt of humiliation above and beyond what their male counterparts face. In many sectors of society it is felt that disabled women are not entitled to love and be loved and are undesirable as wives of normal men.

American promotion

THE MINISTRY of Tourism has allocated \$3 million to promote Egypt on the American market in a bid to improve what is still considered a weak market. "The funds will go toward advertisements on CNN and local TV stations, promotions in major US newspapers, including *The Washington Post* and *San Francisco Chronicle* and a campaign in American travel magazines," explained Mamdouh El-Beltagi, minister of tourism.

The total number of US tourists who came to Egypt in 1995 was 154,851. In the first half of 1996, 106,000 Americans have travelled here. This figure is expected to rise to 200,000 by the end of the year.

Japanese market

A CAMPAIGN has been launched in Japan as part of an effort to increase the number of Japanese tourists travelling to Egypt. "EgyptAir is expanding its flights from three to four a week, and negotiations are under way between Egyptian and Japanese officials to begin operating JAL flights between the two countries again," said Mamdouh El-Beltagi, minister of tourism.

New flights

TWO weekly flights are now operating between Kuwait and Hurgada. The number of Arab tourists from the Gulf area is expected to increase by 25,000 before the end of the year.

Coasting along

A NEW coastal road extending for 75km from Damietta to Kaf El-Sheikh is nearly finished. It is due to open by the end of October.

The project is part of a three-year plan to connect eight governorates along the northern coast from Marsa Matruh through Alexandria, Damietta and Port Said, to Rafah. The new road is expected to encourage tourism along the northern coast.

Luxor developments

WORK on three new international arrival and departure halls at Luxor Airport is nearly finished. Due to open by October, the halls were built at a cost of LE200,000 to accommodate the increased flow of passengers.

In addition, LE1 million has been allocated to upgrade the docking facilities in Luxor which will extend for 2.7km along the Nile Corniche. A new station along with water, electricity and telephone lines will be installed. The possibility of extending the dock for a distance of 4.2km, thereby enabling it to accommodate up to 32 Nile cruisers, is also being considered.

Touring artefacts

ONE hundred and thirty-two Coptic artefacts are currently on display in Germany. "Egypt... Treasures from the Desert: Coptic Art" was inaugurated in mid-June as part of a year-long travelling exhibition which will tour several European cities, including Munich and Vienna. Other items included in the exhibition have been borrowed from the Louvre and Berlin museums.

Saudi-Sharm link

A NEW ferry is now operating between Sharm El-Sheikh and the Saudi harbour of Daba. The journey takes eight hours and serves primarily Saudi passengers travelling to the Sinai, Suez Canal cities and Cairo.

Marine museum

YOUSSEF Pasha Kamal's palace in Alexandria's Stanley Bay section of the Corniche is going to be converted into a marine museum. It will display 62 objects currently being restored and documented by the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA).

The artefacts represent different eras of shipping in Egypt from Pharaonic times to the present. One of the most important objects is a statue weighing almost 25 tons, showing Isis, goddess of the sea, with sailors. The statue will be placed on a 16m-high base, overlooking the sea.



The last of Tutankhamun's treasures were removed from his tomb in 1932; his replica tomb (right) shows the objects as they were on the day of their discovery

photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Dreaming of Alexander

Two great characters in history have captured the imagination of Hassan Ragab. Rehab Saad describes his projects to recreate great moments

The Tomb of Tutankhamun, as it was when discovered by Howard Carter in 1922, no longer exists. Its treasures are in the Egyptian Museum, and apart from one sarcophagus, the tomb is completely empty. Hassan Ragab, however, constructed the very first replica tomb in Egypt: Tutankhamun's tomb in the Pharaonic Village in Giza. It opened in 1992.

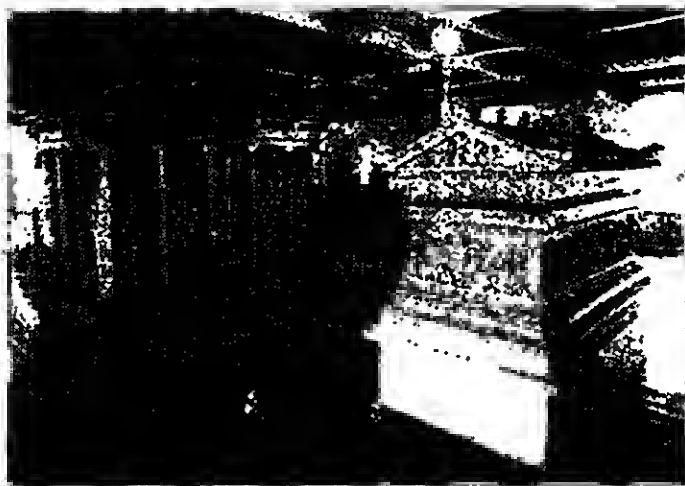
The success of the project encouraged Ragab to turn his vision to another great historic figure: Alexander the Great. "For four years I have studied everything written by historians and travellers about the era in which he lived," Ragab said. He added that although there is a Graeco-Roman museum in Alexandria and numerous archaeological sites that date back to the Graeco-Roman period, Alexander's Alexandria no longer exists. "I visualise recreating the city he founded," he said.

Ragab is determined that everything should be as accurate as information will allow. He learned a great deal from his experience with his first project, the replica tomb of the boy-king Tutankhamun. "There we studied the position of objects found in the tomb from photos taken during its excavation, items displayed at the Egyptian Museum and descriptions of the tomb written in books, especially the one by Howard Carter himself," Ragab said.

He stressed that building a replica was not an easy job. It cost him \$3 million and he faced many difficulties trying to create an exact replica. "In the actual tomb, one must descend 16 steps into the inner chambers. At the Pharaonic Village we could not dig into the bedrock because the village is on

an island. We overcame that problem by constructing the tomb on two stories. Tourists begin their tour on the second level where they get a brief history of the tomb before entering the gently downward sloping, reconstructed shaft to the entrance of the replica. We have managed to create the atmosphere of a real tomb, bursting with treasure piled in complete confusion."

Furthermore, the large number of tourist groups visiting the tomb at one time caused congestion



Alexander's museum will recapture his era photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

problems. "We solved this problem by building a corridor around the chambers of the tomb, thereby allowing groups to pass through one after the other," he said.

The success of this project encouraged Ragab to build other replicas of Tutankhamun's tomb in the US. There is one in the Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada, another at Bush Gardens in Tampa, Flor-

ida, and a third under construction in Memphis, Tennessee. "In my opinion, a replica tomb could interest more tourists in visiting the Valley of the Kings. When people see the replica tomb of Tutankhamun they become anxious to witness the real thing," he said.

When he approached the task of recreating the world of the warrior Alexander the Great, Ragab began by having his artists make replicas of the weapons and shields, using existing photos and portraits as models. He also recreated areas of old Alexandria in his museum at the Ragab Papyrus Institute in Dokki. "The historical heartland of Alexandria lies in one of the poorest districts of the city. We want to recreate it as it was in its heyday," Ragab said. "We have already worked for three years to finish the first stage of the project, and it will take another three to complete it," he continued.

A billboard describing the life of Alexander the Great and the Ptolemaic dynasty in Alexandria, as well as a huge map of the empire he created, will be the first thing a visitor sees upon entering the replica. Among the important items displayed will be a replica of the warrior's sarcophagus, now residing in Istanbul, along with weapons, shields, armour, war chariots, the huge catapults designed to fling rocks at castle walls and even models of the horses he used in battle. "One of the most interesting features will be a miniature model of old Alexandria. This will include the great Eastern Harbour and the famous lighthouse both of which no longer exist, and most importantly, miniature models of the library and the museum of Alexandria as described by Strabo," Ragab said.

Through oil paintings and mosaics, the visitor will be able to view Al-

exander the Great's life from birth to death. One of the paintings will portray a young Alexander being given the horse "Bucephalus" by his father. This horse became his favourite and accompanied him on all his travels and expeditions. Another huge mosaic will show the battle of Issus in 333BC when Alexander's army faced the Persian King Darius.

"I also plan another panorama in the museum showing Alexander choosing the site for his Mediterranean capital and cultural centre, and discussing the details of its construction with his architect," said Ragab.

"Other pictures will demonstrate the respect with which Alexander treated his captives. The visitor will round off the tour by seeing a portrait of Alexander on his death bed with his devoted surroundings him and kissing his hands," Ragab explained.

Ragab insisted that things won't end here. "I dream of building the whole village of Alexandria in Ptolemaic style, including replicas of Alexander's sarcophagus and the library of Alexandria."

He has a way of making his dreams come true.

How to get there

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurgada and Sinai. Tel. 772-063.

Cairo-Alexandria Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 5pm, LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm, LE30 thereafter.

A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matruh Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.

Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32. Cairo-Port Said Services every half hour from 6am to 8pm; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said Service 6.45am, from Ramsis Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurgada Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurgada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurgada Service 8pm, from Ramsis Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurgada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE30 each way.

East Delta Bus Company Buses travel to North Sinai, South Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qalati (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets depart bus LE3.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qalati, then Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets depart bus LE3.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qalati, then Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets depart bus LE3.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh Services every 45 min, from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza.

Tickets

morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba Services 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets depart bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurgada Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safage Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Qusier Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Ainwan Service 5pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Trains Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Laccor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3553.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan "French" deluxe trains with sleepers Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE34 for foreigners; LE120 for Egyptians; to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.

"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor first class LE31; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria "Torbini" trains YIP train Service bus. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal. Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 3pm and 5pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.

"French" trains Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Jolly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 759-9806. Tickets LE300 for Egyptians, LE991 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor Tickets LE370 for Egyptians, LE780 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurgada Tickets LE338 for Egyptians, LE780 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh Tickets LE246 for Egyptians, LE821 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Compiled by Rehab Saad

EGYPT AIR

Telephone numbers of EGYPT AIR offices in governorates:

Abu Simbel Sales Office:	34836-34735
Alexandria Office: Ramh:	483357-483778
Gleem:	586341-586534
Airport Office:	4218464-422788-428237-4281589
Aswan Office:	315800/12/34
Airport Office:	408367-408588
Assiut Office:	323151-322711-324004-325407
Mansoura Office:	363978-363733
Hurgada Office:	4435914
Airport Office:	442833-443597
Ismailia Office:	328571-321958-321951/2-328336
Luxor Office:	384580/12/34
Airport Office:	3845678
Luxor Office Karnak:	382369
Marsa Matruh Office:	934398
Menoufia Office (Sheba El Kom):	233392-233523-233522
New Valley Office:	68246105
Port Said Office:	224123-222878-228921
Port Said Office Karnak:	238333-239970
Sharm El Sheikh Office:	686344-686409
Airport Office:	686408
Taba Office:	68253016-638011
Direct:	5783628
Tanta Office:	317580/317789
Zakazik Office:	348235-348391

World War II panorama on the North Coast

Many tourist villages have been built on the North Coast area, with their wonderful sights, green land, artificial lakes and dedicated services guests expect to receive. The North Coast is expected to become a destination for tourists from all over the world. Determined to achieve this end, an idea for a project was born 10 years ago, namely building a tourist city of history.

The man behind this idea is Mostafa Guindy, chairman of EGC. This historically-themed city will be situated in an area near Sidi Abdel-Rahman. Within this city will be a World War II panorama. Many villages will be built neighbouring each other, with each having a particular style such as Bavarian, German, Italian, English, Indian and Greek, representing countries that took part in the war.

The main attraction will, of course be the historical theme that will permeate the city. Other attractions will lie in its facilities, such as an airport, artificial lakes and outstanding services.

The project has attracted the attention of the Egyptian minister of tourism, Mamdouh El-Beltagi. After the initial approval of authorities was given to EGC, specialised international companies were contacted to promote awareness about this project. Many countries have already expressed a desire to provide financing in order to turn this plan into action.

Hawks in tombs

A mummified hawk cemetery has been found in the Delta, as described by Sherine Nasr

The discovery of several hundred mummified birds in Tel Abu Yassin, northeast of the city of Zagazig in the Sharqiya Governorate, has aroused considerable interest. Not only is it the largest sacred hawk cemetery ever found, but it is also evidence that the birds were interred by the wealthy as well as the poor.

"Excavations yielded five long rows of mud brick tombs where hawks, wrapped in white linen, were discovered," said Hisham El-Hefnawi, an archaeologist who has worked at the site since 1994. He described the walls of the tombs as divided into niches where the sacred birds were buried in one of two ways: "Some were mummified and placed in limestone sarcophagi, while others were placed directly into the niche," said El-Hefnawi. He went on to explain that in other tombs, hawks were buried one on top of the other with a layer of sand separating each row. "This indicates that the cemetery was used by both upper and lower class people," he continued. Hawks' eggs were also mummified, covered in linen and kept in clay pots.

The tombs are believed to date back to the 30th Dynasty (roughly 300BC), an era which witnessed a growing trend toward animal-worship. "Different birds and animals were worshipped as gods in different areas. The hawk, the animal representation of Horus the sky-god, was the god of Tel Abu Yassin. Horus was also closely associated with cult centres in Upper Egypt, most notably at the Temple of Horus at Edfu, a famous tourist site," explained El-Hefnawi.

In his role as Horus of Behdet, a town in the Delta, "Horus was worshipped as Ra during the midday hours, when the sun was at its highest, because the hawk was considered the strongest bird," said Abdel-Halim Rizk, director general of Lower Egypt Antiquities. "Ancient Egyptians believed that keeping a living symbol of the god in their homes would guarantee them good luck and security. This explains why an entire cemetery was set aside for their burials." Some of the unearthed hawks were wearing gold tunics.

Impressive though the discovery was, spirits were somewhat dampened by the poor state in which many of the birds were found. "Most of the mummified remains were badly affected by high humidity and underground water," said El-Hefnawi. "Some of them literally disintegrated immediately upon exposure to sunlight." "Even the tombs were partially damaged," he added, "with their vaulted ceilings crumbling because irrigation water had seeped into them."

The discovery of the hawk cemetery is but one of the many findings in this area. Tel Abu Yassin is a tell (sandy hill) covering an area of approximately 20 feddans. There are three strata of burial chambers. "The first contains humans, the second hawks and the third ibis birds," said El-Hefnawi. Earlier excavations, about 20 metres from the new site, disclosed nine granite sarcophagi containing mummified ibises. "Also, a large mummified bull and the tools used for mummification were found in one of these sarcophagi," he added.

Archaeologists working on the site are confident that they will unearth more relics. "The main streets in the tell have already been excavated. More objects will certainly be found as more houses are removed and excavation continues," stated El-Hefnawi.

Lucky seven

Zamalek and Arab Contractors kept Egypt's hopes alive in the Continental Cup Championships last weekend, advancing to the semifinals of the competitions. Eric Asomugha reports

Barely a week after Ahli's 3-1 defeat over Rague of Morocco to win the 12th Arab League Champions Cup, Zamalek and Arab Contractors ushered in another moment of joy and jubilation as fans celebrated their weekend qualifications to the semi-finals of the African Champions Cup and Cup Winners Cup respectively.

In a replay of the previous weeks games the victims were two Moroccan clubs. Zamalek managed to hold the Mekras team (CODM) to a 2-2 draw, while Arab Contractors beat Fath Union (FUS) 1-0 in Cairo. Both matches were the second leg of the quarter-final matches. In the first leg, Zamalek defeated CODM 2-0 in Cairo and Arab Contractors held FUS to a goalless draw in Morocco.

Mekras and Fath Union clubs are out, but, as the saying goes, its not over till the fat lady sings. The two countries are set to battle for supremacy once again next month when they meet for the 1998 African Cup of Nations qualifier.

The Champions Cup ended in a miraculous 2-2 draw in Rabat for which Zamalek coach Dieter Werner deserves full credit. He succeeded in instilling confidence and discipline to Zamalek, reduced to 10 men in the 8th minute of the first half, Zamalek's chance of surviving the remaining 82 minutes was daunting and the Moroccan looked confident in their ability to massacre their opponent before the final whistle. But Zamalek proved that it doesn't much matter being one man down in football, as they showed their will to fight on no matter the circumstances.

The referee's 8th minute decision to give Zamalek's Ahmed Kass a red card was unclear since the incident took place far from where the ball was on play. It was prompted by a Moroccan player who was seen writing on the grass close to the box. His team mates, accusing Kass of foul play, called it to the attention of the referee. After a brief consultation with the linesman, the confused referee delivered his judgment which became a blessing in disguise for Zamalek.

CODM, wanting a victory at all cost, took full advantage and piled on the pressure. Zamalek responded by applying a

more defensive strategy and hardly played beyond the halfway line, relying instead on rare counter attacks.

The pressure intensified and in the 27th minute, the Moroccan got the first goal through Youssef Al-Merzili.

About two minutes later, in the first major move after Quasi Said's miss earlier on, Zamalek's Tarek Mustafa fired into the net at close range for the equaliser.

Knowing that more goals were needed to secure a victory, the Moroccan attacked ruthlessly. Their exertions paid off as they took a 2-1 lead through the efforts of Abdallah Belbaki before the break.

Prepared for another gruelling 45 minutes, Werner's instructions were taken on board by Zamalek who stood firm against determined attacks. A counter move came in the 38th minute as Ayman Mansour collected a fine pass from Mohamed Sabri and slammed it into the net to level at 2-2. Zamalek not only ended CODM's Cup campaign but also won the hearts of the Moroccan fans.

In the Cup Winners Cup, Arab Contractors needed only a goal to advance to the next stage and they did just that. Mohamed Ouda's powerful grounder from Abdel-Sater Sabri's effort produced the only goal of the match in the 11th minute which secured the Contractors a semi-final berth.

For the Champions Cup semifinal, Zamalek will meet CS Sfaxien of Tunisia and Arab Contractors plays Canon of Cameroon in the Winners Cup. Both teams are on course to rekindle past memories. Zamalek won the Champions Cup in both 1984 and 1993. The Contractors, in their turn, brought home the Winners Cup in 1982 and 1983.

Meanwhile, the premier league went on hiatus on 20 September, in its seventh week and is set to resume on 10 October. The short break is being taken to allow the national team, on a ten-day training tour in France, to prepare for the African Nations Cup and World Cup qualifier.

At the top of the league table is Zamalek with 15 points in five matches. Ismaili is in second place with 14 points from seven matches and Mansoura is trailing behind with 13 points from six matches.



A Contractors player hauls off an opponent

photo: Abdel-Aziz El-Nimr

Five-aside qualifications

EGYPT met Zimbabwe Wednesday in the opening of the African five-aside soccer qualifications for the indoor football world championship to be held in Spain next November. Egypt is hosting the qualification which will include five African teams; Zimbabwe, Zaire, Ghana, Somalia and Egypt. Another four teams have withdrawn from the event; South Africa, Namibia, Swaziland, and Gambia.

All matches which will be played in a one-round league, are to take place in the Main Hall of the Cairo Stadium indoor complex.

League standing

Club	P	W	D	L	Gf	Ga	Pts
Zamalek	5	5	-	-	11	2	15
Ismaili	7	4	2	1	11	7	14
Mansoura	6	4	1	1	14	7	13
Qena	6	4	1	1	9	3	13
I. Osman	6	4	1	1	8	6	13
I. Alex	7	3	2	2	9	7	11
Masri	6	2	3	1	9	7	9
Abli	4	2	2	-	6	4	8
Shebin	6	2	2	2	4	4	8
G. Mehalla	7	1	3	3	9	11	6
A. Contractors	4	1	2	1	5	4	5
Aswan	6	1	2	3	7	13	5
Suez	6	1	1	4	4	9	4
Mariekh	7	1	-	6	11	18	3
Kroum	6	1	-	5	7	15	3
Aluminium	7	-	2	5	8	12	2

Schedule of the fixtures

Date	Match	Kick off
25.09.1996	Opening ceremony	20.15
	Egypt vs. Zimbabwe	21.00
	Ghana vs. Zaire	22.15
26.09.1996	Zaire vs. Somalia	18.30
	Egypt vs. Ghana	20.15
27.09.96	Zimbabwe vs. Ghana	18.30
	E. Somalia vs. Egypt	20.15
28.09.1996	Rest	
29.09.1996	Zaire vs. Zimbabwe	18.00
	Ghana vs. Somalia	19.30
30.09.1996	Zimbabwe vs. Somalia	18.00
	Egypt vs. Zaire	19.15

Fists of fury

Instead of a medal, Egypt's Mahmoud Shalabi returned from the 3rd African Tae Kwon Do Championship with a broken arm, courtesy of the tournament's coaches, referees and martial artists. Eman Abdel-Moeti reports

The scene was more reminiscent of a B-grade kung fu film than a continental tae kwon do championship; fists were flying, roundhouse kicks were aplenty and sportsmanship was out of the window. And the Egyptian national tae kwon do team, after fending off a wave of hostile African competitors, withdrew from the 3rd African Tae Kwon Do Championship, held last week in South Africa.

At first glance the seeds of discontent were sown mainly as a result of a skewed 3-1 decision by referees during a semi-final match between Egypt's Mahmoud Shalabi and a martial artist from Lesotho. At the end of the match, the Korean referee, representing Libya awarded the match to the Basotho and, in so doing, inciting the ire of Shalabi, who ripped off his *hogu* (chest pad) and threw it to the floor in frustration. The reason behind Shalabi's anger, assert Egyptian national team officials, was that he had obviously won the match, but the referee had purposely reversed the scores to favour the Basotho.

"Shalabi is the one who scored the three points," said Amr Khairy, manager of the national team. "The surprising thing was that before the Egyptian delegation could make a move, the rest of the re-

ference started beating Shalabi up and, within seconds, were joined by the rest of the teams and their coaches." Shalabi emerged from the brawl with a broken arm, while team coach Farag El-Emary walked away with some cuts and bruises.

But the roots of the problem run much deeper than this incident, argue Egyptian officials. Given the way that everything was blown completely out of proportion and got so out of hand, it's obvious that there was a conspiracy brewing on the part of the other African countries to get Egypt out of the competition completely, said Mostafa Bakir, president of the Egyptian Tae Kwon Do Federation. To that end they may have succeeded. Egypt not only withdrew from the competition, but is considering not competing in any future African tae kwon do championships.

"It was clear from day one, when we arrived in South Africa, that there was a conspiracy against Egypt," said El-Emary. "They put us up in a place one and a half hours away from the competition site, and finding buses to take us to the tournament was extremely difficult."

"Moreover, whenever we asked the organising committee about anything, they said they didn't

know," he added.

What really cemented the issue of referee credibility, or lack thereof, however, was the fact that the scoring was done manually even though computer scoring was available. "The referees refused to use the scoring computers provided by the African Federation, although they were trained to use them four days before the competition began," noted Khairy. "Of course, this casts a large shadow of doubt over the referees' credibility."

According to the team members, these charges are by no means exaggerated. It was apparent, said the Egyptian martial artists, that the referees had it out for them from day one, but because the first few Egyptian competitors won their first fights via knockouts, there was no room for score manipulation. Shalabi, national team officials allege, was not so lucky.

"It is very easy to cheat in manual scoring, because you do not know which move resulted in a point until the end of the match," explained Khairy. "But with the computers, points are registered instantly, allowing you to see which technique led to a point."

According to team officials, there is more ev-

idence to indicate that foul play was at hand. Although the referees were Korean, they still have to answer to the federations of the African countries they represent. And, in the case of Shalabi's match, two of the four referees were Koreans representing Libya, a team Shalabi was to square off against in the final. Consequently, it was imperative that he be knocked out of the running during the semi-finals.

"It is only natural that a player might contest a referee's decision — it happens all the time," said Khairy. "And while Shalabi should not have lost his temper in this way, there is absolutely no justification for the referees' actions — that was just too much."

Any lingering doubts that Egyptian officials were making a mountain out of a mole hill were shattered on the second day of the competition, when another fight almost broke out and the members of the African teams began shouting. "Leave, leave." Following this incident, the Egyptian Tae Kwon Do Federation withdrew the team from the competition, fearing for the safety of the competitors. The remaining African countries distributed the medals won by Egypt amongst them-

selves.

"None of the remaining 12 countries won the championship," said Sayed Khashaba, head of the African Tae Kwon Do Federation. "This [championship] was a farce in every sense of the word."

According to Khashaba, International Tae Kwon Do Federation (ITF) officials attended the championship and saw what happened. Egypt, he said, will file a complaint with the ITF about the incident.

As a result of Egypt's withdrawal from the competition and the subsequent distribution of medals, no one country emerged as the winner of the competition.

Following the conclusion of the competition, a meeting was held to decide who will host the 4th African Tae Kwon Do Championship, and bids were submitted by Tunisia and Ghana. Ghana, however, neither sent a team during the 3rd African Championship, nor presented any evidence of having the necessary facilities in which to hold the tournament. As a result, the unanimous decision was that Tunisia would host the competition.

Open and shut

The Gezira Squash Open ended last Friday with the world's number one player Jansher Khan dominating



Ahmed Barada and Jansher Khan play in a glass-court in the Gezira Open

photo: Selah Ibrahim

The Gezira Squash Open witnessed a thrilling encounter between world-ranked number one Jansher Khan and number two Rodney Eyles. Eman Abdel-Moeti reports. With 3,000 Egyptian fans watching Khan, in a superb performance, avenged his defeat by Eyles in the Hong Kong Open last month. It was a game of experience and skill which ended in Khan's 3-0 victory.

The Egyptian national team's performance was also spectacular with the players greatly improved since Al-Ahram Open. Egypt's premier squash stars — Ahmed Faizy, Omar El-Brolllosy, Amir Wagih and Ahmed Barada displayed their best for the fans in the main draw.

Although Faizy, competing against Pakistan's Zubair Jahan and Omar El-Brolllosy playing against Rodney Eyles were knocked out in the first round there was much skill to come.

Amir Wagih and Ahmed Barada provided heavy drama as they met in the second round in an intense game between coach and pupil. The spectators were divided; those for Barada against those who cheered Wagih. As the game intensified a fight between excited fans was narrowly averted in the stands as Barada proceeded to trounce his coach 3-0. With what assuredly were mixed emotions Wagih, in a scene to bring tears to the eyes of the most hardened in-

dividual, declared the obvious — that Barada had played the better game. Barada in turn expressed his gratitude to Wagih who had trained him since he was eight years old.

World-ranked 13th, Barada then met Jansher Khan in the quarter-final in a game witnessed by 3,500 spectators — the largest number in squash history. The enthusiasm of the fans had its effect on Barada, keen to score his first victory over the world's top player, while Jansher appeared a little shaky at the beginning of the first match. In contrast to the later Jansher and Eyles confrontation in the final, Barada's match with Jansher was a test of endurance and experience.

In his second engagement with the world number one, even as it was evident that he would lose, Barada refused to give Jansher an easy victory as he displayed his determination to win at least one game. The 3,500 loyal fans cheered as he earned his first win despite his 3-1 match defeat.

In recognition of Egypt's success in organising squash competitions most of the participating squash stars announced their intention to return for next year's Gezira Open and for the Heliopolis Open as well.

Edited by Inas Mazhar

Fahmi Mikhail: Drawing the fourth dimension

Since he burst onto the scientific scene with a truly big bang, he's had Newton somersaulting in his grave



"This means — there must be a creator!" The impulsive speaker was a young Egyptian studying for his doctorate. The same fervent believer later dedicated his life's work to further applications of Einstein's theory of general relativity. Fahmi Mikhail has succeeded in defining the practical applications of Einstein's theory of general relativity — without leaving his faith by the wayside.

"In 1949, I was studying for my doctorate in the mathematics of relativity with W H McCrea of the University of London. Professor McCrea, was being conferred the fellowship of the Royal Society. That day, I listened attentively to discussions of a new theory known as the theory of the continuous creation of matter. The theory, formulated by two world-renowned scientists, Bondi and Gold, establishes that the number of galaxies in the universe has a constant statistical density. In other words, galaxies are constant in number despite the expansion of the universe. Discussion of the theory proceeded thus: if we posit that the universe is in a state of expansion, then it logically follows that certain galaxies will be lost, and others created from 'nothing'. The statement provoked the objection of a participant, who indignantly asked: 'What does this mean, creation from nothing?' I found myself replying: 'It means there is a creator'."

McCrea wrote of Mikhail: "His field equations concerning a generalised field theory of relativity represent the most general and natural modification of general relativity which can be applied to all purposes."

It should be noted that after the appearance of his theory of general relativity in 1929, Einstein himself tried to modify it in the forties to accommodate all natural phenomena, but attained no definite results except in the case of gravity. Other renowned mathematicians and physicists (among them Schrodinger in 1949) undertook experiments for the same purpose but were unsuccessful. Mi-

khal obtained definite results in 1961.

Mikhail's name is not immediately recognisable to the non-specialist. His work speaks for itself, and he abhors publicity. Since he became acquainted with the theory of relativity, in 1950, he has studied it thoroughly, gradually mastering it. He describes it as a theory which has progressed slowly, unlike quantum theories which have — no pun intended — made leaps and bounds.

His contributions to his field continued uninterrupted to the mid-nineties. Two Japanese scientists, Takeshi Shiraugi and Kenji Hayashi, have now established the foundations for a new unified theory of relativity. "Their work was based on the results I had achieved many years before, so what more recognition do I need?" He needs no official pomp to confirm this knowledge.

Mikhail was born on 1 January, 1921 in Kafr Al-Sheikh to a middle-class family. His outstanding academic record ensured him a free education. His father died when he was in his first year of secondary school, and young Mikhail decided to quit school and work for a living. His uncle, however, insisted that the bright boy remain in school. In the second year of secondary school in Tanta, he obtained full marks in his mid-year exams in algebra, geometry and natural history. The headmaster went to meet a high official in the Ministry of Education, and asked that the young prodigy be exempted from having to pay school fees. But the official explained that such a privilege was granted only to those students who came out on top at the end of the school year. "So this became my goal, and I did come out on top at the end of the year, which ensured me exemption from school fees during the following two years." He finished twenty-third overall in his final year, and was granted another scholarship.

His first choice was to study engineering. He had averaged 75 per cent on the secondary school certificate — a figure which may seem mediocre

today when compared with averages that soar to 102 per cent, but which nonetheless placed him first overall in the Governorate of Mansura. His financially straitened conditions had not abated, and he hoped to be exempted from tuition fees again. His hopes were dashed, however, when the Swiss dean of the faculty explained that full exemption was granted only to the first two final places, the third paying half fees. "As I sat in El-Ezbekiya Gardens lamenting my luck, I met a man from my village who opened new vistas of hope. He suggested that I enroll in the Faculty of Science, since a ten pound bonus was granted for distinction in any subject. I joined the faculty in 1937-38. There were 78 students in all, 21 of us in freshmen in the mathematics department. Our ranks thinned until only three of us remained at graduation."

The teaching staff in the thirties was basically British. Ali Musharafa Pasha was the first Egyptian head of the Mathematics Department and later dean of the Faculty of Science. He was a brilliant scholar, distinguished in the field of applied mathematics, but not so in relativity, and had never in his life encountered Einstein's theories. Applied mathematics was a totally new science at the time. When Mikhail graduated in 1941, he could not find a job, and joined a teachers' training institute instead to qualify as a science teacher. He found a teaching job at Ras El-Tin school in Alexandria, and got married. When the war ended, a fellowship system for study abroad was set up, but only for university instructors. Mikhail's dreams of studying abroad suddenly became reality when the fellowship system began to admit graduates of teaching institutes. In 1946, he applied to study for a master's degree in education — "though all along I yearned to study relativity, which had fascinated me."

His passion for relativity has grown unabated fifty years. Here, in the modest office on the

fourth floor of the Faculty of Science building, shared with four other professors, he prepares to initiate his students to its secrets: the difference between general and special relativity, the unified field theory and the achievements of Newton and Einstein. There are four cheap wooden desks; the room is bare, the walls colourless, the old flooring scarred by the heavy tread of thousands of students. Not a curtain, not a plant, only an old, scratched blackboard (no longer black) and some chalk.

Going to England in 1947, he did not study education, but wrote both his master's thesis and his doctoral dissertation on the applications of the theory of relativity. Upon his return, he joined the staff at the Faculty of Science. In 1965 he was appointed head of the Mathematics Department, then from 1971 to '74 served as vice-dean of the faculty. In 1974, he went to Iraq where he taught mathematics, and was vice-dean of the Technical Military Institute. Since 1981, he has been a professor emeritus.

Einstein established a new law to explain gravity instead of the inverse square law introduced by Newton to explain the movement of the planets around the sun. Newton had established that the orbits of the planets in space are stable. In 1845, a French scientist discovered that the orbit of Mercury was not stable in space. There was no possible means to explain the reason for this by applying classical mechanics. It was not until Einstein explained this contradiction through relativity. But at the beginning, relativity could only explain phenomena which depended on the gravitational field. It did not succeed in describing phenomena related to electromagnetism, a failure which Einstein admitted in 1929.

"In 1950, I went to a book shop in London where books were sold quite cheap. I liked the book shop not only for its books, but for the excellent bearing system as well. As I was flipping through the books, I found a pamphlet which cost only six pence. It proved to be the turning point in my scientific life. The study was entitled 'A Simplified Form of Einstein's Relativity' by Livi Civita, the famous scientist who had taught Einstein tensor calculus. The theory was simplified by the use of the tetrad space method. I set myself to analyse the findings, but found they were all incorrect. I therefore applied the tetrad space method myself, and arrived at other results. Since 1950, my findings have been the basis for any researcher using the tetrad space method."

The non-mathematician will find references to general and special relativity confusing, to say the least. Requests to explain bring a glimmer to Mikhail's eyes. The teacher in him leaps to the fore. Colleagues describe him as the best person to go to if one is lost in the maze of relativity's intricacies.

"Relativity does not start with Einstein. French philosopher Henri Poincaré held a conference in 1904, a year before Einstein, to announce his discovery of the theory of special relativity. Poincaré called for a reconsideration of the fundamental principles of mechanics. Along the same lines, Einstein developed the principle of the denial of the absolute. He argued that there was no absolute movement — only relative."

Newton had been aware of this concept when he posited the existence of a certain fictitious body in the depths of the universe to which the speed of any body is related. "Einstein put these scattered notions in order and established his theory of special relativity (which pertains to gravity only). In simple terms, special relativity deals with flat space. General relativity, on the other hand, deals

with accelerated relative motion caused by the presence of a field force. For this reason, Einstein was both a genius and a fortunate man, since he had many predecessors who had already prepared the way for him."

When Einstein moved to the US, he tried to develop a theory that would explain all physical phenomena. Special relativity proved inadequate to explain anything beyond gravity. A unified field theory was needed. Einstein's endeavours to develop such a theory in 1945-47 failed. The mathematical solution proposed by Mikhail in his doctoral dissertation of 1950, and in his later publications, have substantially contributed to the theoretical solution of the contradiction between general relativity, where bodies are not electromagnetically charged, and the unified field, where bodies are.

When he returned to Egypt in 1952, Mikhail told his colleagues that, if Einstein had lived to see his solution, he would have been very pleased. "When the chairman of the university heard what I had said, he was critical and would not listen to me defend my ideas. Since that day, I learned never to expound my views except to my closest colleagues versed in these matters."

Yet the rarefied air Mikhail breathes, out there in the cosmos, has not made him oblivious to the mundane problems of pupils struggling with their simple equations. He spent thirty years writing mathematics textbooks for schools. "I have always aimed at developing the mathematical mental abilities of the student, to teach him to think scientifically. The aim of education is to develop the ability to think critically rather than the ability to learn by passively receiving what is dictated." He is disappointed with the new mathematics books, which are not written with the aim of establishing a scientific method based on definitions, the assumption of premises and truths, and the derivation of laws and theories. The scientific method consists of exercises for building minds capable of application and of purely speculative thought. This system has long been forgotten, "and the examination system is an added calamity." His educational method can be summed up thus: "I am not after forming 'clever' students, but only students with 'scientific' minds."

It was question time. When else does a mathematical amateur have the opportunity of hearing what the fourth dimension really is? There were to be no clear-cut answers, though. When the same question was posed to him in a television interview, he replied: "It may be possible to draw a delusion, but it is impossible to draw the fourth dimension!"

Profile by Ragi Halim

Correction: the photograph accompanying the profile of Robert Mabro last week was taken by Khaled El-Fiqi



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by Madame Sosostis

Our very own famous photographer Randa Shaath does not believe in rushing things when it comes to tying the knot. She believes in starting at the beginning and the beginning is the reading of her *fatha* which took place last week during a family gathering. She and the lucky groom, photographer Tom (Karim) Hartwell exchanged rings then sipped the traditional *sharbat*, which was prepared according to Randa's secret recipe. A love potion, if you ask me, by the look on Tom's face. Randa is in no hurry to plan for the second step, her engagement party but we already know that she and Tom want a summer wedding. I'm glad they are giving me advance warning and enough time to design that adorable little number I shall be wearing at the wedding. Randa is actually quite taken by the mad pink chiffon I have carefully chosen for the occasion. I wonder who will be taking pictures on the wedding day!

For those of you whose Alma Mater is AUC like me, you must have heard that the Century Committee meetings have been taking place last week. Well, these meetings were not only hard work, as you may have guessed, they included a great dinner at Le Pasha Floating Restaurant in the most

pleasantly relaxing atmosphere. While floating away in the company of Ambassador Herman Elits, AUC Trustee, Dr Amr Abdel-Hamid, dean of the school of Science and Engineering, Lubna Abdel-Hamid, Dr Donald McDonald, AUC president, Mr Attallah Wahba and my dear friends Mary Iskandar,

director of Alumni and Trustee Affairs Office and Mounir Doss, I thought that it was really uplifting to discuss the future of AUC and its educational role in Egypt and the Middle East or any other topic for that matter in such an enchanting setting.

And guess what is happening now to my good friend Sherif Delawar? He is shortly to become the Honorary Consul of India in Alexandria, as well as remaining a prominent businessman in the Alexandria Businessmen Association. HE Kanwal Sibal, ambassador of India, will be delivering the official papers confirming the appointment shortly. Mabrouk, Sherif!

Well dears, I wanted you to be the first to know. I am once more off to Paris to attend the vernissage of my dear, dear friend Adly Ristakallah whose exhibition will open on the first October at the Egyptian Cultural Centre. As you may or may not know — I am a great fan of Adly's aquarels and of course I adore Paris and the autumn. It is so much more distinguished than the springtime! So, dears, à très bientôt.



Photo: Salah Omar



Top: Ambassador Herman Elits, Dr Amr Abdel-Hamid, Lubna Abdel-Hamid, Dr Donald McDonald and Mary Iskandar Bottom: Randa and Tom (Karim)